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SAINT JOHNSON

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BY

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Author of

"LITTLE CAESAR," "IRON MAN"

LINCOLN MAC VEAGH

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To
GRENVILLE VERNON

NOTE

It may interest the reader to learn that the "Alkali" of the story is drawn in part from the old Arizona frontier town, Tombstone: a boom mining-camp and cow-capitol, which grew, over night, from a collection of tents to a County Seat of ten thousand.

Two of the principal characters, Wayt Johnson and Brant White, are drawn in part from two of the Old West's most famous men: Wyatt Earp, Dodge City and Tombstone peace-officer, and Doc Holliday, gambler, gunfighter and wit.

The story itself is based on the events leading up to and arising out of the Earp-Clanton feud. This famous old feud is still hotly discussed in the southeastern corner of Arizona.

You never heard him kick. He had troubles, plenty of 'em, but he wasn't one of them fellers that thinks God is taking a special delight in plaguing him. He says to me: It's all in a lifetime.

—Words of an Old Timer

PART I

I

It was toward evening when Wayt Johnson swung off his horse and hitched it to the rack in front of the Golden Girl Saloon. The sun was just setting over beyond Eagle Mountain and it was already dusk in in the valley. Wayt was a big man, blonde, aquiline, with broad shoulders and a rawboned, loose-hung frame he had inherited from a long line of pioneer ancestors. He walked with a pronounced slouch and carried his head a little to one side. His dark suit and his big black hat were covered with alkali dust and when he had hitched his horse, he took off his gloves and brushed himself.

Brant White was lounging in the doorway and when he saw Wayt, he came out. Wayt smiled.

"Howdy, Brant," he said.

"Howdy, Wayt," said Brant. "Some late, ain't you?"

"Yes," said Wayt, "but I put in a good day, Brant. Found that black mare I lost last April."

"You don't tell me," said Brant. "I'll bet a blue

stack you didn't find her running loose on th
range."

"And you'd be betting on a sure thing," sai
Wayt. "No; I found her hitched in front of Joe
Place over in Elderville. I confiscated horse an
saddle."

They both laughed.

"Some of them Northrups," said Brant.

"Well," said Wayt, "I heard tell this saddle I con
fiscated was Frame Tod's, which is practically th
same."

They laughed and Wayt put his arm across Brant
shoulders and they went into the saloon. Deadwood
Luther Johnson, and Wayt's partner, Ed Deal, wer
sitting at a table near the end of the bar, talking
Wayt turned to Brant.

"Where's Jim?"

Brant rubbed his chin, looked off across the ba
and said:

"Jim was here a while back."

Wayt glanced sharply at Brant.

"Where is he now?"

"Well, Wayt," said Brant, "Jim's pretty drunk
to tell you the truth, and I seen him heading nort
on Main Street with that Mexican gal of his."

Wayt said nothing but walked over to the table where the three men were sitting and sank into a chair.

"Howdy, boss," said Deadwood.

"Howdy," said Wayt.

Neither Deal nor Luther Johnson spoke but sat looking at Wayt.

"I found my black mare," said Wayt.

"I reckoned you'd find her over Elderville way one of these days," said Luther.

"Frame Tod had her," said Wayt, "so I confiscated her, saddle and all."

"That ought to start something," said Brant White.

Deal shifted uneasily in his chair, but Luther nodded and then spat accurately at a spittoon six feet away.

"The sooner the better," said Luther.

"No," said Wayt, "that ain't the idea. I ain't looking for trouble. I'm just taking what's my own."

Brant laughed.

"I never seen you running from trouble yet," he said.

"No," said Wayt, "but I ain't running toward it none neither."

"That's a bad bunch," said Deal; "that Northrup-Tod bunch is plumb bad."

"Never you mind, Ed," said Brant. "Don't 'pear to me like we ever asked you to pull no guns for us."

"Let Ed alone," said Wayt.

Deal glanced at Brant, then, taking a pack of cards from the table-drawer, he began to play solitaire.

"Deadwood," said Wayt, "I'm going to let you ride that mare till I need her. She's down to the corral. I'm used to that blasted gelding now."

"Much oblige, boss," said Deadwood. "I like that mare."

"Watch out one of them Tods don't take her away from you," said Brant, laughing.

Deadwood grunted, then leaned on his elbows and watched Deal's game of solitaire.

It was almost dark now. Along Main Street the street-lamps were being lit, and big oil flares were burning in front of the Palace Dance Hall across the way. Men began to drift into the bar: cowhands, miners, Mexicans, and a few strangers in dark clothes and derbies. In the rear of the Golden Girl Brant White was waiting to open his faro game, and

Ed Deal had gone behind the bar to help his three bartenders.

Wayt leaned across the table and took his brother Luther by the arm.

"What about Jim?"

"Well," said Luther, "Jim's drunk and as soon as he gets drunk he lights out for that Mexican gal of his."

"Deadwood," said Wayt, "go get Jim. You'll find him up at Orante's near the station."

"All right, boss," said Deadwood.

He got slowly to his feet, finished his whiskey, which had been sitting untouched at his elbow, and started for the door. He was a small man, heavy in the shoulders, and bow-legged. He was nearly as swarthy as a Mexican, and his hair and mustache were dead black. He walked with a rolling motion, like a sailor on land, with his big white cowboy's hat on the back of his head and his thumbs hooked in his gunbelt.

When he had gone Wayt said:

"Luther, you got to help me with Jim."

"I'll help you," said Luther; "but he's twenty-one, Wayt. He's old enough to look after himself."

"Sure," said Wayt, "but you got to do your part

just the same. First place, he's going to get himself in a heap of trouble if he don't stay sober. Second place, he's something the citizens can point to. There goes Law and Order Johnson's brother, consorting with Mexicans and drunk as a Texas cowhand."

Luther rubbed his chin and stared at his brother.

"Wayt," he said, "it 'pears to me like you think more of being sheriff than you do of your own kin."

Wayt looked at him sharply, then lowered his eyes, and, crossing his legs, began to play with one of his spurs.

"Yes sir," said Luther, "ever since you got this sheriff bee in your bonnet you ain't been like yourself nohow."

Wayt didn't say anything. Luther looked at him a little uneasily.

"I'll help you with Jim, Wayt," he said.

Wayt took out some makings and a packet of brown papers, and rolled himself a cigarette.

"You know," said Wayt, "one of us has got to have an official backing, Luther, or our lives won't be worth ten cents on the dollar. You and Jim don't 'pear to appreciate that fact."

"I appreciate it sure enough," said Luther. "But

ain't I town marshal? Ain't you a Federal deputy marshal?"

"By appointment," said Wayt, lighting his cigarette.

"Well?"

"What we want is electing," said Wayt. "I'm going to be the next sheriff of San Miguel county or bust a button."

"I'd be powerful glad to see it," said Luther, "but you got strong opposition, Wayt. I been thinking that this town ain't ready for law and order nohow, and you're getting yourself in trouble trying to give it to 'em."

Wayt smiled.

"That's what they told me in Kansas," he said.

Luther lowered his eyes and stared into his whiskey glass. Wayt poured himself a small drink from Luther's bottle.

The Golden Girl was filling up now. An unending crowd poured in through the big front door. Wayt kept nodding to the customers, who, with few exceptions, addressed him as "Mr. Johnson."

"And furthermore," said Wayt, fingering his glass, "Jim ought to be looking after my interests here. I'm a busy man, Lute, and you can't be wast-

ing your time sitting in a barroom. Deal's all right. Straight enough man, I reckon. But flesh is flesh, and if a man don't look after his own business, he's bound to lose it."

"Jim's rattleheaded," said Luther.

"I want you to help me, Lute."

"I'll do the best I know how."

Wayt turned his glass round and round. Neither of them spoke for a minute or so, then Wayt flushed slightly and said:

"You know, Lute, I take a heap of interest in Jimmy, even if you do put it up to me I'm thinking more of being sheriff. He was the old lady's favorite."

Luther stirred uneasily and lowered his eyes, but said nothing. He was a big, broad man, and his kinship with Wayt was very apparent, as they had the same long, bony faces and the same aquiline noses, but he was darker, heavier, more silent, inclined to be sullen and ill-tempered.

Wayt turned to watch the crowd in the saloon. At the bar three bartenders, assisted by Deal, were kept busy pouring raw whiskey or else mixing fizzes and rickeys for the more discriminating. At the back, Brant White's faro game was crowded

and Smith Sanders, his hat tilted over his eyes, was sitting in the look-out's seat. Opposite the bar, across the big room, there were four poker games going, one stud and three draw.

Luther raised his eyes from his whiskey, glanced at the doorway, then took Wayt by the arm.

"There's Poe Northrup," he said.

Wayt turned in his chair and sat with his legs crossed, looking at Northrup, who was standing with his hands on his hips, his legs straddled, his hat pushed back, staring at them.

Poe Northrup was big and burly, with a swarthy complexion and a big, dark mustache he was very proud of. He walked with a swagger, jingling his spurs, and was very quarrelsome and domineering. He had a big cattle ranch down in the San Jose Valley, and he was allied with the Tod brothers, who posed as honest ranchmen, but did a thriving business in Mexican cattle which had somehow made their appearance in Arizona.

"Well, well," said Poe, "if it ain't our old friend Mr. Dodge City, Law and Order, Johnson. How's business, old timer?"

"Good," said Wayt.

"Say," said Poe, "they tell me you've kind of got

out of the law and order business of late years and sort of got it in your head you'd take up horse stealing."

Luther sat up suddenly and dropped his right hand below the level of the table. A dozen men at the end of the bar nearest the door turned and stared at Poe. A few of them edged toward the back of the saloon.

"Speaking about that black mare," said Wayt, smiling, "you tell Frame Tod I got a clear title. Also, beings you're a friend of his, you might tell him he can get his saddle by dropping in at the North End Corral."

"Frame bought that mare off a Mexican," said Poe. "If you want her, why don't you go to Frame like a man and pay him what he got stuck for."

"I beg to disagree with you," said Wayt. Then turning to Luther he said: "I feel a spell of hunger coming on."

"Wait a minute," said Poe. "While I'm here and you're within hearing, which you ain't usually when there's a Tod or a Northrup in sight, I'm going to tell you something. The ranchers in this here community are getting mighty sick of Mr. Law

and Order Johnson making gallery plays so he can be the next sheriff. Yes sir. We're right sick of it and we aims to put a stop to it somehow or other."

"Come on, Lute," said Wayt; "I'm plumb starved."

"Look at him run," said Poe, as Wayt got to his feet.

"You shut up," said Luther. "You're drunk and if you don't mend your ways in about two minutes you're going to jail."

Poe threw back his head and laughed.

"You're going to jail in about a minute," said Luther, "if I have to bend a gun over your head."

"Try it," said Poe.

"Let him be," said Wayt, taking Luther by the arm; "he ain't harming nobody. Let him shoot off his mouth and relieve his feelings some."

Brant White left his faro game, pushed his way through the crowd and stood leaning on the table Wayt had just left, smiling at Poe, his short upper lip curled back from his big teeth.

"Poe," he said, "I ain't no peace officer, so you can go as far as you like with me. If you're spoiling for a fight, get your gun out and go to work."

"Wait a minute," said Wayt, stepping between them. "There won't be no fighting. The first man that touches his gun is going to jail."

Poe stood glaring at Brant over Wayt's shoulder, then he said:

"There's too many of you."

"That's sense," said Wayt. "Go take a drink on the house, Poe, and keep your war talk for the range."

"I drink with no Johnsons," said Poe and turned away. "There's my back, Brant," he called over his shoulder, "that ought to steady your hand."

"You blasted cattle thief!" Brant shouted, "I'll be right out."

Just as Poe was leaving, Fin Elder, the sheriff, came in the door. He was a little man, about forty, with a red face and a paunch. His head was set right down on his shoulders, and his legs were thin and bowed.

"What's the trouble! What's the trouble!" he shouted, bustling in.

"War talk, Fin," said Wayt. "Brant and Poe 'lows they'll shoot each other up some."

"This'll never do, boys," said the sheriff. "Why can't you forget them guns for a spell and be

amicable and friendly-like. Plenty of room in this town for everybody."

"Too many Johnsons," said Poe. "We're aiming to thin them out a whole lot."

"Now, now," said Fin. "Let's me and you go across to the Transcontinental, Poe, and argue this thing out."

"You speak for Poe, Fin, and I'll speak for Brant," said Wayt.

"Good, good," said Fin; "it's a bargain. Come on, Poe."

He took Poe by the arm and started to pull him toward the door.

"Too many badges in this town," Poe called over his shoulder; "too damn many badges."

When Fin and Poe had gone, the poker games were resumed and the drinkers, their thirst increased by their anxiety of a moment ago, rushed up to the bar and called loudly for drinks. The timid came in from the back rooms and from the back porch, where they had been hiding. Brant put his hand on Wayt's shoulder.

"Wayt," he said, "that Northrup needs killing, and it's only a question of time."

"You boys got to help me, Brant," said Wayt.

"I'm going to clean this town up and you got to help me."

"All right," said Brant, "but them cattlemen have got to be a little less promiscuous with their language."

Wayt turned to Luther.

"Let's go eat, Lute."

"No," said Luther, "I'm going out and walk around some. If one of them San Jose Valley boys is in town, there's more, and I don't aim to have 'em interrupting the peace."

"Keep that gun in your pocket then," said Wayt.

He nodded to the others and went out the front door and stopped on the sidewalk. Across the street in front of the Transcontinental Hotel, Fin Elder and Poe Northrup were talking, gesticulating under the street-lamp. Wayt watched them for a little while, then he crossed the street diagonally and went into Mattie's Eating-House. He knew that the sheriff hated him, that he favored the cattlemen and the lawless element. He knew that Poe Northrup and the sheriff were the best of friends and that the sheriff would go the limit for him. But he wasn't ready to acknowledge that situation

yet, not publicly. He pretended to be taken in like the rest of the citizens of Alkali.

Bossy, Mattie's husband, smiled and bowed when Wayt came in.

"Howdy, Mr. Johnson," he said. "Our steak dinner is fine tonight, yes sir."

"All right," said Wayt, who hardly ever paid any attention to what he ate.

"Yes sir," said Bossy.

While Wayt ate his meal, he sat looking out into Main Street. The wooden sidewalks were crowded and under each street-lamp a group of men was talking and laughing. Miners with unkempt beards slouched along with cowhands wearing big hats and jean pants stuffed into short boots. There were Mexicans, Indians, strangers from the East in store clothes and derby hats, and cavalry officers from Fort Blaine, swaggering about jingling their spurs and staring at the women. Wayt liked to sit looking out while he ate. He liked Alkali; a wanderer, he felt at home there. He liked to see Alkali in the morning when the sun was coming up over the Red Hills. He liked the desert and the sage brush; the half-dried streams and the deep arroyos. But

most of all he liked Alkali at night, with the street-lamps and the oil flares, and the miners, the cow-hands, the citizens crowding the wooden arcades; the blazing saloons and dance halls, the quiet desert beyond.

When he had finished, he put his money on the table, called good night to Bossy and went out.

Deadwood met him at the door of the Golden Girl and took him by the arm.

"Boss," said Deadwood, "Jim's some drunk and abusive. I couldn't get him to come with me no-how. I done the best I could, boss, but I was feared he'd start a runkus."

Wayt said nothing but went back down the steps, unhitched his horse, and rode off. Deadwood waited till he was out of sight, then he got on his horse and followed him.

There was a small Mexican settlement at the north edge of town, near the Southern Pacific Rail-road Station. Jim Johnson's woman, Remedios Orante, lived in one of the little shacks behind the station at the end of Main Street. When Wayt rode up, Jim was sitting out in front of the shack with Remedios and her brother, Ramon.

"Jim," called Wayt, "I want you to come along with me."

Jim said nothing, but Remedios put her arm around him and talked rapidly in Spanish, urging him to go. The Mexicans were afraid of Wayt Johnson, since he had run down and killed Miguel Soto, the notorious outlaw. Finally Jim got up, walked over to Wayt, and put his hand on the pommel of the saddle.

"I'm plumb sorry, Wayt," he said.

Wayt said nothing.

"Good evening, Señor Johnson," said Ramon Orante.

"Good evening," said Wayt. "Come on, Jim."

Wayt turned his horse in the direction of the Golden Girl and Jim walked along silently beside him with his hand on the stirrup. At the next street intersection they saw Deadwood waiting for them. As soon as he saw them, he turned his horse toward town and rode off without a word.

"Jim," said Wayt, "you failed me. You went back on your word."

"I got drunk, Wayt," said Jim. "I tell you I'm plumb sorry."

"Telling me don't rope no steers," said Wayt.

They went along in silence, taking a back way to the saloon and avoiding the crowds on Main Street.

"You got to buck up, Jim," said Wayt. "You got to leave that liquor alone or drink it like a man. I need you over at the Golden Girl, Jim."

"I won't do it no more, Wayt."

II

"Jim," said Brant White, "you better get back in here. You're powerful drunk, man, and if you go capering round the town, Wayt'll hear of it."

"Let him," said Jim.

He and Brant were standing on the sidewalk in front of the Golden Girl, and Brant had hold of his arm. Ordinarily Jim was easy to manage. Used to the authority of Wayt, he seldom made up his mind or willed his own actions. But when he was drunk, he was as stubborn as Luther sober, and nearly as dangerous. For over a week he had shunned both liquor and the Mexican settlement, but he couldn't stand the strain. Brant argued with him long enough to make him give up his gun, then he shrugged his shoulders and let him go.

Jim was unmistakably a Johnson. He was tall, rawboned, angular, with blonde hair and aquiline features. But his face was more delicate than either Wayt's or Luther's; he lacked their vitality and their strength of character. In spite of his size and

his ruddiness, there was something almost feminine in his appearance; his mouth, though large and full lipped, was slack, and in the place of a beard a golden down covered his cheeks and his upper lip and it was so light that he had never had to shave.

Jim started off north on Main Street, and Brant watched him till he was out of sight. The sun was high in the sky; there was no wind, and heat waves were dancing in the street. Jim walked fast, swinging his long arms and looking straight ahead. Loungers followed him with their eyes and nudged one another. Mr. Johnson's brother was no law and order boy, but a good, upstanding youngster with a mind of his own, yes sir! At the corner of Bonanza and Main, Jim paused to look into Dixon's gun store. He wanted a gun and he saw a pearl-handled .44 Colt in the window like the one Wayt had taken from Miguel Soto. He leaned against the building and counted his money. Not enough. Damn Wayt, who always kept him broke. While he was standing there, staring, someone came up behind him and hit him on the back.

"Howdy, Mr. Johnson number three. How's the world treating you?"

Jim turned. It was Joe Tod and behind him was a group of cowhands, all grinning.

"Keep your hands off of me," said Jim.

"Now, now," said Joe. "Can't a man greet you friendly-like without you ruffling up your back? I'm damned if I ever see such a cantankerous litter as the litter Mrs. Johnson pupped."

The cowhands all laughed and slapped each other on the back. Jim braced himself, then, with a sudden movement, jumped on Joe Tod and struck him across the face. A cowhand stepped up behind Jim and hit him in the back of the head with the butt of his gun. Jim wavered and fell on his back but raised his legs and tried to kick Joe Tod in the groin. Joe drew away, laughing.

"As cantankerous a litter as I ever see," he said.

A crowd was slowly forming now and most of the cowhands began to disappear, some of them unhitching their horses from the rack in front of the gun store, some of them walking back between the buildings. In a few minutes only Joe Tod and his foreman, Luis Montoya, were left. Mr. Dixon came out of his gun store and helped Jim to his feet.

"I'll shoot you dead for this," said Jim.

"You're drunk and fractious," said Joe, "and you started the whole runkus yourself. Didn't he?"

Luis smiled, rubbed his hand over his face, and nodded.

"That's right," said a man in the crowd, "I seen the whole thing."

"He ain't even got a gun," said Mr. Dixon, glaring at Joe Tod.

"He struck the first blow," said the man in the crowd; "I seen him."

"Get the sheriff and I'll appear against him," said Joe. "Tain't safe on the streets no more in this here law and order town."

Smith Sanders pushed his way through the crowd and put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?"

"Jimmy got fractious and 'lowed he'd kick my face in," said Joe, laughing, "but somebody peeled him back of the ear."

"Shut your mouth," said Jim, trying to pull away from Dixon. "I'll shoot you dead for this."

"Hear him making his threats?" said Joe.

"The boy's drunk, Smith," said Dixon.

"Jim," said Smith, "you better come back to the saloon with me. You're bleeding, son."

"What if I am!" said Jim.

Then he jerked away from Dixon, turned, started north on Main Street again and pushed his way through the crowd.

"Somebody get the sheriff," said Joe, "and I'll appear against that bull calf."

"Tod," said Smith, "if you know what's good for you, you'll get on your horse and get out of town before Wayt gets back."

Joe laughed.

"I ain't afraid of no Johnsons, horse thieves and such."

Dixon glanced at Smith Sanders and shook his head slightly. They both knew that there'd be trouble in Alkali before nightfall.

"Joe Tod," said Dixon, "you're either drunk or mighty reckless."

Smith Sanders turned and pushed his way through the crowd.

Joe hooked his thumbs in his gunbelt and stood with his feet apart, rocking on his toes and heels.

" 'Pears to me the citizens of this here town are mighty scairt of a passel of Kansas sodbusters."

Luis Montoya took him by the arm and whispered

a few words in his ear, but Joe shook him off and leaned against the front of the gun store with his legs crossed and his hat pushed back. Luis shrugged, unhitched his horse, and rode off.

The crowd quickly dispersed, and in half an hour the story was all over town. Reporters from the *Courier* and the *Herald* bustled about hunting eyewitnesses.

When Smith Sanders got to the Golden Girl he saw Luther taking his first drink of the day and hurried over to him.

"Howdy, Smith," said Luther. "You 'pear to be a sight agitated."

"I am," said Smith.

Then, leaning on the bar, and holding his whiskey glass in a hand that shook, he told Luther the whole story, neglecting nothing. Luther didn't say anything but stood staring into the mirror behind the bar, listening. When Smith had finished his story, Luther tossed down another whiskey, adjusted his gunbelt and started out.

"I'm going along, Lute," said Smith.

"No," said Luther, "I ain't needing any help."

Luther went slowly out of the Golden Girl, looked up and down, then started north on Main Street.

Half a square from Bonanza he met George Stanley, one of Fin Elder's deputies.

"Howdy, Luther," said George. "Hot, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Luther; "reckon it'll cool off 'fore nightfall."

He started away but George took him by the arm.

"What's the hurry, Luther?"

"I got a little matter that needs 'tending to," said Luther.

"Want me to go along?"

"No, thanks, George," said Luther, smiling.

Luther started down the street and George stood looking after him, undecided, then he stepped in between two buildings and took a short cut to the sheriff's office. Near Bonanza Street Luther cut diagonally across Main toward Dixon's gun store. Joe Tod was still there, talking to a couple of cowhands, who had just ridden up. They had been having an argument about the respective merits of their horses, and Tod had led his horse up on the sidewalk to demonstrate some point.

"Howdy, Luther," called Joe.

"Howdy," said Luther. "That your horse, Joe?"

"Sure is," said Joe. "Just traded for him a while back."

"Well," said Luther, "get him off the sidewalk."

Joe stared.

"We got a city ordinance about horses on the sidewalk, Joe," said Luther, "and I aim to enforce it."

"Well," said Joe, "beings you're the chief officer and factotum in this here city, lead him off yourself."

"Joe," said Luther, "get that horse off the sidewalk."

"I'll be damned if I do," said Joe. "Looky here, you almighty Johnson, any time you and your kin are looking for a fight, I got it all ready for you."

"All right," said Luther, stepping toward Joe, "fight right here."

Before Joe could make up his mind to pull his gun, Luther hit him a resounding blow with his left hand. Joe fell to the sidewalk and Luther kicked his gun out of its holster, then he jerked him to his feet and hustled him toward the jail. The cowhands stood with their mouths open, watching Joe being led away.

On the way to the jail, Luther met Fin Elder and George Stanley. Fin Elder's face was red and he was puffing.

"Hold on there, Luther," said Fin. "What you doing with Joe Tod?"

"I'm arresting him," said Luther, "and I don't want no interference nohow."

"What's he done?" demanded Fin.

"Resisting an officer," said Luther and pushed past them with his prisoner.

Fin Elder and his deputy followed them at a little distance. At the end of Archer Street Fin Elder turned into Justice Williams' office and George Stanley went on and sat down on a bench in front of the jail.

III

The sun was setting over beyond Eagle Mountain when Wayt rode into the edge of Alkali. He had been in Holmesburg looking up some water rights for Marcus Wingett and he had had a long hard ride. After passing the Southern Pacific Station, he threw a leg over the pommel and, rolling a cigarette, let his horse amble along Main Street. Men called from their doorways to him: "Howdy, Mr. Johnson. Been a hot day, ain't it?"

When he rode up in front of the Golden Girl he saw Brant, Smith, and Luther standing on the sidewalk and the looks on their faces made him uneasy.

"Where's Jim?" he called.

"Lit out again," said Luther.

He went into the saloon and they followed him, silently. Deadwood was sitting at a table near the bar playing solitaire and Ed Deal was watching him. Deal was pale.

"What's the matter, Ed?" Wayt demanded.

Then, as Deal did not reply, he turned and looked at the others.

"Well," said Luther, "I had to lock Joe Tod up today."

"That so!" said Wayt, sitting down and crossing his legs.

Little by little he got it out of them. First Brant, then Luther, then Smith gave a version of what had happened. Wayt sat playing with one of his spurs, nodding from time to time. Luther broke out:

"It's fight now, Wayt. It's fight or be killed. The whole city's agin us, Wayt. We got to shoot it out once and for all."

"No," said Wayt, "we'll do it 'cording to law."

" 'Cording to law!" cried Luther. "And Joe Tod let loose fifteen minutes after I locked him up and handed back his gun and fined twenty-five dollars, fine suspended!"

"It's a fact, Wayt," said Brant. "Law and order don't go in this here city if the object of arrest is a cattleman, no sir! Shoot it out with 'em, Wayt, and there's an end on it."

"Look at that," said Ed Deal, shoving a copy of the Alkali *Herald* at Wayt.

"Johnson brothers at it again. James Johnson the cause of a violent street disturbance this morning at ten-thirty. He repeatedly insulted Mr. Joseph Tod, well-known ranchman, and was finally subdued by an indignant employee of Mr. Tod. . . . Tod was assaulted by Luther Johnson, James's brother, a peace officer, and taken to jail. . . . This must stop. We want peace officers who have no ulterior motive in wearing a badge."

Wayt tossed the paper back to Deal.

"That's the cattlemen's sheet," he said.

Nobody spoke but they all sat looking at Wayt, wondering what was on his mind.

"Deadwood," said Wayt, "go get Jimmy."

"All right, boss," said Deadwood; "I'll do the best I know how."

When Deadwood had gone Wayt rolled himself a cigarette, then lifted Brant's foot and struck a match on it.

"Boys," he said, "you act like yearlings. Trust me, that's all I'm asking you. I'm aiming to take over this town 'fore long. And I'm telling you, she's ready for law and order and she's going to get it."

"I'll tell you what she's going to get," said Ed

Deal, "she's going to get a heap of killing 'fore the month's out, or I'm a Mexican."

"For once I go along with you, Ed," said Brant.

While they were talking Marcus Wingett came in the front door and walked up to them. Wingett was one of the richest men in the community. He had always been friendly with the Johnson faction and was responsible for the appointment of Luther as town marshal to finish the unexpired term of John Fitzgerald, who had been killed.

"Howdy, boys," said Wingett.

"Howdy, Mr. Wingett," said Wayt. "I got that little matter of yours over Holmesburg way straightened up."

"Good," said Wingett, then he turned to Luther. "Lute," he said, "I want to shake your hand. What you did today was the work of a brave man. A few more arrests like that and these so-called ranchmen won't be so frisky in our city."

"Thank you, Mr. Wingett," said Luther, taking the hand offered him.

Wayt laughed.

"The boys was getting mighty downhearted about that matter, Mr. Wingett," he said. "I'm surely glad you dropped in."

Deal handed Wingett the *Herald* and Wingett read it, smiling.

"Never you mind," he said. "They'll change their tune."

He sat down with them and had a drink.

"Wayt," he said, "the community owes you and your brother a vote of thanks for what you've done in these parts. Now don't you ever get it in your head the community ain't behind you. It is. The law-abiding element is a sight timid since them cowboys killed Marshal Fitzgerald, but you got to give 'em time."

"That's what I been saying," said Wayt. Then turning half around in his chair and looking straight at Wingett, he went on: "I been kind of figuring and I was thinking the best thing we could do would be to sort of boost for a city ordinance prohibiting the carrying of firearms in the city."

Wingett bent his head and pulled at his mustache.

"Maybe you're right," he said, after thinking it over. "I'll see what I can do. But if we pass that ordinance you'll have to enforce it, you boys."

"We'll enforce it all right," said Wayt, and Luther nodded.

When Wingett had gone, Brant sat for a long time looking at Wayt, then he laughed.

"Luther," he said, "did anybody ever tell you that you got a mighty foxy and double-dealing brother?"

Luther smiled.

"You can't want nothing better than that," said Brant. "That'll certainly take some of the kinks out of that bunch of cattlemen, yes sir!"

They all had a drink to celebrate, then Wayt went out to get his supper.

The restaurant was crowded. Bossy led Wayt to a table in the rear, where one man was already seated.

"Sorry, Mr. Johnson," said Bossy, "but this is the best I can do for you right at present."

The man at the table got up and bowed as Wayt sat down. It was Joe Tod's foreman, Luis Montoya, called El Guero (The Blonde), because of his light brown hair and his gray eyes.

"Good evening, Señor Johnson," he said. "Permit me to sit with you, if you please."

"Howdy, Luis," said Wayt.

"A most unfortunate thing happened today," said El Guero, smiling and showing his teeth.

"I heard about it," said Wayt so sharply that the Mexican lowered his eyes and ate in silence.

Bossy brought Wayt his food, then stood leaning on the table, eager for a talk.

"Nice day, wasn't it, Mr. Johnson?" he said. "A lot of sun, but a nice wind sprung up about two o'clock. Yes sir."

"That's about right," said Wayt, paying no attention.

Bossy hesitated for a moment, then went away.

When El Guero rose to go, he bowed slightly and said:

"With your permission."

Wayt nodded without looking up and El Guero put his money on the table and went out.

"The varmint!" said Wayt, under his breath.

He knew that El Guero was a cold-blooded killer and had at one time been a member of Miguel Soto's band of outlaws. Everybody knew it, but as there was no evidence strong enough to bring an indictment he went free and posed as an honest cattleman along with the Tods.

Wayt found Deadwood waiting for him outside the restaurant. Deadwood had his right hand stuck

in the front of his shirt and Wayt could see that there was something wrong with it.

"How about Jim?"

"He won't come," said Deadwood; then he jerked his head downward toward his hand. "He like to busted my hand, boss. Nobody but a Johnson could do that to me."

"What did he do?" asked Wayt.

"When I tried to make him come along he hit me with a stick. I don't take that kindly nohow."

Wayt put his hand on Deadwood's shoulder.

"I got my hands full," he said. "Don't tell me you're going to quit helping me!"

"I'll help you, boss," said Deadwood.

"Good," said Wayt. "Now you just run along up to Doc Harley and let him look at that hand. Tell him I'm paying for it."

"All right, boss," said Deadwood; then: "Boss, if I was you I'd pound some sense into Jimmy. He's going to get you all in a heap of trouble one of these days."

"You run along," said Wayt.

Deadwood hesitated.

"I ain't trying to butt into your business none, boss," he said.

"I know," said Wayt.

When Deadwood had gone, Wayt walked over to the Golden Girl, unhitched his horse and rode up to the North End Corral. When he swung to the ground just inside the corral gate someone put a hand on his shoulder. It was Lew Casey, manager of the corral.

"Wayt," said Casey, "I seen that runkus today. It was Joe Tod's fault. He was baiting your brother."

"Thanks, Lew."

"I got a powerful liking for young Jim Johnson," said Casey.

Wayt said nothing and Casey called to the hostler, then went back into his office.

"Look him over good," said Wayt to the hostler; "he's seen a heap of country today."

"All right, Mr. Johnson," said the hostler.

Wayt rolled a cigarette, then walked in the direction of the Orante shack over behind the railroad station. As he was on foot no one paid any attention to him and he was in front of the shack before Jim knew anything about it. There were four of them sitting there: Remedios, Ramon, Jim and a man Wayt didn't know.

"Jim!" called Wayt.

The stranger jumped to his feet and ran into the shanty.

"Jim!" Wayt called again.

"I heard you, Wayt," said Jim, "but I ain't going with you no more."

"Jim," said Wayt, "I'm coming in after you."

There was a long silence.

"Jim has got a hurt in his head," said Remedios. "Jim can hardly walk."

"Come out of there, Jim," said Wayt.

"It would be better you leave him here, señor," said Ramon. "Tomorrow he will come."

Wayt threw his cigarette away and started toward them, but Jim got hastily to his feet and came to meet him.

"Wayt," he said, "can't you leave me be? I ain't harming you none."

Wayt took him by the arm and said: "Wait here." Then he walked past Ramon and Remedios, who jumped to their feet and stood bowing, and went inside the shack. A kerosene lamp was burning on a table in the middle of the room. A big man with tousled red hair and wearing a dirty flannel shirt was sitting at the table. When Wayt entered

he got to his feet awkwardly and stood looking at Wayt, trying to grin.

"Who are you?" Wayt asked.

"My name's Red Harness," said the stranger.

"Where from?"

"Well," said the stranger, "from Texas original. Ain't got no regular address at present."

"What you doing round these parts?"

"Just seeing the town," said the stranger, grinning. Taking a bottle from his pocket, he inquired: "Have a drink?"

"No," said Wayt, and walked out.

Jim was standing just outside the door and drew back when he saw Wayt.

"All right, Jim," said Wayt.

"I ain't going," said Jim. "I reckon I'm old enough to say what I can do and what I can't."

"Listen to your brother," said Ramon, bowing slightly in Wayt's direction.

"I guess he knows does he stay or not," said Remedios.

"Be quiet," said Wayt, then he gave Jim a shove and started him down the street ahead of him.

"You ain't got no right, Wayt," said Jim, but he kept walking just the same.

When they got to the Golden Girl Wayt took Jim into an unoccupied back room and shut the door.

"Jim," he said, "I'm plumb ashamed of you making a fool of yourself in front of Mexicans. Where's your pride, son?"

"Wayt," said Jim, "I'm all-fired weary and sick of being a little boy. I'm growed up now and I'm old enough to do what I feel like."

"Jim," said Wayt, "I'm not going to stand by and watch you get yourself mixed up with a bunch of lousy Mexicans and bandits."

"Bandits!" said Jim, recoiling.

"You heard me mention that word," said Wayt. "I'll lay ten to one that Red Harness is hiding out from justice right now."

Jim said nothing but began to bite his nails. Suddenly he burst out:

"I want money! I want my own money. I want to live my own way and not be beholden to no man for my keep. I want my own say-so."

Wayt put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"Son," he said, "get yourself a little sleep and talk it over with me in the morning. You've raised enough hell for one day."

They went up to Jim's room over the Golden Girl and Wayt sat talking while Jim undressed. Finally Jim got in bed and turned his face to the wall.

"I'll see you bright and early," said Wayt. "Good night."

"Good night," said Jim, but as Wayt shut the door he muttered: "You'll see me no more in Alkali."

Wayt went down into the Golden Girl, nodded to the customers, and took Ed Deal aside.

"Ed," he said, "tell Deadwood I took his horse for a spell."

Deal nodded and went back to his work.

Wayt rode east on Huston Street, past the blazing lights of the White Front Saloon, and out into the open country along the Old Trail to the Painter Creek ford. It was cool now and a slow, steady wind was blowing across the desert land. There wasn't a cloud and the sky was vast and faraway, full of big, bright stars. Off to the east, beyond Painter Creek, Wayt could see the dark outlines of the Red Hills and perched up in them, the tiny lights of the Joe Elder Mine. South of him, coyotes

were yapping, their voices coming from a great distance in the quiet night.

He reigned in his horse, flung his leg over the pommel and sat looking off across the desert, which was faintly gray in the moonlight.

"Yes sir," he said, "this here sure is my country."

IV

At seven o'clock the next morning, he was awakened by Deadwood.

"Boss," he said, "Jim's done lit out for good."

Wayt sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Where's he gone?"

"Don't know where he's gone," said Deadwood, "but he took your black mare from the corral and he's got Brant's rifle."

"All right," said Wayt, and Deadwood went out, yawning and stretching.

PART II

I

BRANT and Luther were standing on the sidewalk in front of the Golden Girl when Wayt, tired and dusty, rode up. Wayt got off his horse, hitched it to the rack, and stood brushing himself with his gloves.

"Well?" said Luther.

"Clean gone," said Wayt. "Nobody's seen that boy since he left Alkali. Mighty queer, I'm thinking."

"What you reckon got into him?" Brant demanded.

"He's just rebellious-like, being a boy," said Wayt.

"He's rattleheaded," said Luther. "I'm not going to get gray hair worrying about him nohow. Best let him do as he sees fit, Wayt."

Wayt didn't say anything and they all walked into the saloon, where Deal, Smith Sanders and two miners were playing poker. Brant and Luther went up to the bar for a drink and Wayt climbed the

stairs to his room. He took off his hat and coat and poured some water in a washbasin.

"Well," he thought, "I done the best I could for Jimmy."

When he had washed, shaved, and changed his shirt, he went down into the saloon and stood watching the poker game. Brant and Luther were sitting in now and the limit had gone up. Brant and one of the miners, called Ike, were the big winners; Deal and the other miner, called Cactus, the big losers. Luther was trailing along, breaking about even.

"Take a hand, Wayt," said Deal.

"No," said Wayt, "I ain't got no stomach for it."

"Forget that boy Jimmy," said Luther, "and set in a spell."

"Jimmy?" said Cactus, turning to Luther. "You mean your brother Jimmy?"

"Yes," said Luther.

"What do you know about him?" asked Wayt.

"Well," said Cactus, "I don't know nothing about him, but I seen him over Holmesburg way two days ago with a rough looking customer on a roan gelding."

"That so?" said Wayt. "What manner of man was this feller on the roan?"

Cactus rubbed his hand over his face and thought.

"Well," he said, "he was a good big feller. Big in the shoulders, I mean. Dirty looking, too. He was riding with high stirrups and he had red hair."

"That wasn't Jimmy you seen," said Wayt. "Jimmy wasn't over that way two days ago."

Brant and Luther both glanced up quickly at Wayt, who contracted his eyebrows and shook his head slightly.

"No," said Brant; "I was talking to Jimmy right here in this place two days ago."

"Maybe you're right," said Cactus, taking a deal. "I been thinking my eyes was failing me the last few years."

Ike picked up his hand and said:

"She's busted, boys." Then he turned to Cactus. "You know dang well that was young Jim Johnson we seen over Holmesburg way, Cactus. You hollered at him yourself and he waved his hat."

"Don't know nothing of the kind," said Cactus, kicking Ike under the table. "Might 've been some

other feller like as not just thinking I was showing myself friendly."

"Maybe, maybe," said Ike hastily, glancing up at Wayt and smiling.

Wayt stood with his hands in his pockets watching the game for about a quarter of an hour, then he said to Luther:

"I'll be back for supper."

Wayt rode his gelding down to the North End Corral and stood talking to Lew Casey. A hostler took off the saddle and led the horse back to be curried and fed. While they were talking Frame Tod sauntered into the office and stood looking at them, his thumbs hooked in his gunbelt. Frame was young, not over twenty-two, and considered handsome by the Mexican girls from War Bonnet to Holmesburg. He was a picture-book cowboy with a big white hat, bright leather chaps studded with silver, high heeled boots, and big, heavy-roweled silver spurs. He walked with a swagger, flourishing a quirt, and stared at all the women he passed. He was the sort of man Wayt disliked at sight.

"Howdy, Mr. Johnson," he said.

"Howdy, Frame," said Wayt. "Get your saddle yet?"

"Just come in for it," said Frame. "Looky here, Mr. Johnson. My brother tells me you're a heap riled over this business. But listen, if that mare's yours take her and welcome, I says. I ride no stolen horse when I know it. No hard feelings with me nohow."

Wayt said nothing but stood looking at Frame.

"Yes sir," Frame went on, "looks to me like a heap of trouble's due to hit this town any time now, and right here I declare myself out. I ain't shooting nobody nor getting shot up neither in a street fight. So there's my platform straight from the shoulder."

"Good," said Wayt, then he turned to Lew Casey. "Well, Lew, I got a matter that needs tending to and I'll be on my way. Take a look at the shoes on my gelding, will you?"

"Sure," said Lew.

Wayt nodded to Frame and walked out of the office. Frame laughed.

"Mr. Rectitudinous Johnson," he said, "that ain't got a good word for nobody but Johnsons

nohow. Queer critter. Missed his calling, Lew. He should 've been a gospel-expounder. Look at him there! Ain't he a proper man with his nice black suit fit for a corpse. Yes sir."

Casey took out his watch and glanced at it, then he began to roll himself a cigarette as if he hadn't heard what Frame was saying.

"You know, Lew," Frame went on, "I like to split my pants laughing at Poe Northrup. A fire-eating feller if I ever seen one. The other day I met him over at the Painter Creek ford and he was boiling. What's the matter, Poe, I says. I'll tell you, son, he says; a matter of an hour ago I come near ridding this long-suffering community of a prize snake. Who might that be? I asks him. Why, he says, that long-legged, disconnected, Kansas son-of-a-bitch, Saint Johnson." Frame bent over and slapped his thigh. "Ain't that a name for you? Yes sir. We've had a heap of fun over that in Elderville."

"I wouldn't be shouting that around if I was you," said Casey. "Wayt's a quiet man and hard to rile, but Luther ain't."

"Now, now," said Frame. "I'm just telling you friendly-like. As I said to Wayt, I ain't hunting

trouble. I'm having too good a time right now to be pointing toward a burying ground. I'm just telling you in fun."

"Come back here, Frame," said Casey, "and I'll give you your saddle."

"Though they didn't have no right, them Johnsons, to go busting my brother Joe in the jaw nohow," said Frame.

"There she is," said Casey, jerking his thumb toward the harness rack where Frame's saddle was hanging.

Wayt stopped at the Southern Pacific Station to have a talk with Will Price, the ticket agent, then he took a back way to the Orante shack. The door was shut and it looked as if there was nobody home, but Wayt pushed open the door without knocking and went in. It was dark inside and Wayt, coming in out of the sun, stood blinking.

Remedios, who had been lying in the bunk, jumped to her feet.

"Who is it?" she cried. "Oh," she said, rubbing her eyes, "Señor Johnson. You come see me?"

She got back into the bunk, lay down and put her hands under her head. She was small and slim, and her features were delicate, and nearly perfect

except for her nose which had been broken when she was a child and was slightly dented at the bridge. Her eyes were long and dark and drawn up a trifle at the outer corners. She had fine teeth and knew it.

"Remedios," said Wayt, "where's your brother?"

"Which brother?" said Remedios. "I have six."

"Ramon."

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe he go with Jimmy."

"Maybe," said Wayt.

Remedios turned over on her back, raised one knee, and from time to time glanced at Wayt out of the corner of her eyes.

"You come see me since Jimmy go?" she inquired. "I like you, Señor Johnson."

Wayt looked at her and smiled.

"Ain't one in the family enough?"

"No," said Remedios. "You come see me, eh? What you care for Ramon?"

Wayt took a billfold out of his hip pocket and put a five dollar bill on the table. Remedios' eyes glowed.

"Now," said Wayt, "I'm leaving this here for you providing you do a little talking."

"What do I know?" she demanded, sitting up and fastening her eyes on the money.

"That's what I'm asking you," said Wayt.

"Give me," said Remedios, getting up and coming over to the table.

Wayt waved her back.

"Who's this Red Harness?"

Remedios came over to Wayt and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Señor," she said, "you promise you never tell?"

"Sure as shooting," said Wayt. "I'm close-mouthed."

"Good," said Remedios.

She went to a battered table which was pushed up against the back wall, got out an old prayer-book and took a picture from the middle of it.

"There," she said, handing it to Wayt and pulling at the five dollar bill which he let her have.

The picture had been cut from a handbill and underneath it, blackened and nearly obliterated, were the words: Wanted! Joel King, alias. . . .

"I took it from his pocket," said Remedios. "He would get drunk and sleep."

Wayt put the picture in his billfold and got to his feet.

"Where's Ramon?" he asked.

"With him," said Remedios, pointing at the pocket where Wayt had put his billfold.

"Want him locked up?"

Remedios shrugged.

"What do I care? He beats me."

"Where's Jimmy?"

"With them."

"Want him locked up?"

"No!"

"Then keep quiet."

Remedios went to the door with Wayt and put her hand on his arm and looked up at him, but he nodded and went out.

"Not like Jimmy," she said as she shut the door.

II

About nine o'clock Deadwood rode up in front of the Golden Girl, dismounted, tied up his horse and crossed the sidewalk. Brant White and Wayt were standing at the bar, talking.

"Well," said Wayt, "did you locate 'em?"

"No," said Deadwood, "they've made themselves mighty scarce some way."

"You didn't go around asking, did you?" Wayt demanded.

Deadwood's face darkened.

"I done what you told me, boss."

"Good," said Wayt, putting his hand on Deadwood's shoulder.

"Deadwood," said Brant, "what's them holes in your hat? Been shooting it up some just for practise?"

"I'm coming to that," said Deadwood. "Boss," he went on, "when I was about two miles out of Elderville some dumb fool took to shooting at me. Look at that hat." He handed it around for inspec-

tion. There were two small bullet holes high up in the crown.

Wayt handed it back to him.

"See anybody?"

"Nary a soul," said Deadwood; "but I heard some horses off to my right, Holmesburg way."

"Reckon they was following you?" asked Brant.

Deadwood nodded.

"Yes," he said. "It's some of that Northrup-Tod bunch. They wasn't shooting just for practise I'm saying. They was aiming to put me under ground. But I had a good horse and he didn't loaf none when them bullets began to kick up the dirt. The first shot made the holes; the rest of 'em didn't come near enough to matter."

"See," said Brant, putting his hand on Wayt's arm; "them boys need killing. Why can't you let us loose some, Wayt, and give us a little elbow room."

"Let me play my own game, Brant," said Wayt. "You know I can't be standing for no two-gun work and Luther and me wearing badges."

"Well," said Deadwood, "I'll go all the way with you, boss, but right now I want to say, there's going to be a heap of killing, legal and unlegal 'fore we're through."

Smith Sanders called to Brant to come back and settle an argument at the faro table and Deadwood went out to take his horse to the corral and get some supper. Wayt sat down at a table near the bar and rolled himself a cigarette. In a little while Marcus Wingett came in followed by Luther. Wingett smiled broadly when he saw Wayt and came over to him, offering his hand.

"Wayt," he said, pumping Wayt's arm, "be sure and take a good look at the morning paper tomorrow. We passed the ordinance."

"Yes sir," said Luther. "A week from today we declare war on gun-toting in this here town."

"That's mighty good news," said Wayt. "Alkali'll be a different place and as safe a city as you'll want in no time."

"That's my opinion exactly," said Wingett, taking some cigars out of his pocket and handing them to Wayt and Luther. "And it's up to the Johnsons, as we can't expect much help from the sheriff's office."

"Far from it," said Wayt.

Wayt and Wingett sat talking, and Luther went out into the town to make his rounds.

III

About three o'clock in the morning, Wayt was awakened by shots and yells. He jumped out of bed and, throwing his window wide open, looked down into the street. A dozen cowboys were riding up Main Street as hard as their ponies could go, whooping and shooting. They were voicing their disapproval of the passing of the ordinance, and one of them was loudly cursing the Johnsons. Wayt reached for his rifle and when the cavalcade rode past the flares of the Palace Dance Hall, he fired at the horse the leader was riding. He missed, but the second shot caught the leader's horse fairly and it stumbled and fell, throwing the cowboy onto the wooden sidewalk, but somebody took him up behind, and the cavalcade disappeared in the direction of Elderville, still whooping and shooting.

Wayt saw Luther, dressed only in his shirt and pants, rush out into the middle of the street and fire several shots after the horsemen. A crowd began to gather at the corner of Main and Archer;

lights appeared in the houses along the street the cowboys had taken.

Luther finished off the dying horse with his revolver, then came up to Wayt's room carrying the saddle.

"Somebody got one of the horses," he said.

"I did," said Wayt, pointing to the ejected shells on the floor. "I thought maybe I could slow 'em up some."

"It's the Northrup bunch," said Luther. "This is Walt Northrup's saddle."

"Swear out a warrant for him," said Wayt, "then you deputize me and I'll serve it."

"All right, Wayt," said Luther.

Together they went through the saddle-bags but found nothing except a smashed pint of whiskey and a box of .44 cartridges.

IV

WAYT and Deadwood rode along in silence. The sun beat down on them and little waves of heat danced over the desert. From time to time a wind sprang up out of the south and swept across the flat land, raising little pillars of sand and bringing to the horsemen the smell of bone-dry vegetation. Ahead of them the Red Hills, miles off but as distinct as if they were only a hundred yards away, rose from the plain, rocky and barren: huge yellow buttes, notched and corroded by the weather. Beyond them, Mount Silver lifted its stony summit, darkened by a passing cloud. They rode, knee to knee, down into a deep arroyo cut in the dry soil by a little stream, whose bed was dry and parched now, and was covered by patches of sand and big flakes of dry mud.

"Horsemen," said Wayt, reining in.

"Yes," said Deadwood, "and one of them's wearing a red shirt like Walt Northrup. I reckon that's our game, Wayt."

Wayt stood up in his stirrups and glanced over the edge of the arroyo.

"It is," said Wayt. "Get out that Winchester and keep a little behind me and to the right."

The three horsemen were letting their horses amble along, and the rider in the middle was sitting with one leg over the pommel, rolling a cigarette. It was Walt Northrup. When they were within fifty yards of the arroyo, Wayt and Deadwood spurred their horses up the steep rise and rode toward them. One of the horsemen jerked his horse around and sped off at a gallop, turning in his saddle to look back. The other two men merely stared.

"Walt," called Wayt, "I want you to come along with me."

"That so?" said Walt, lighting his cigarette. "What you got against me, Mr. Johnson? Figuring to take my arms and shoot me in the back?"

"I got a warrant," said Wayt, "and I'm aiming to serve it however you please."

Walt laughed, but the man with him turned his horse sideways and made a sudden movement with his right hand. Deadwood brought his Winchester to his shoulder.

"Hold on, Cam," said Walt, glancing around at

him. "You want to scare the daylights out of these here Law and Order boys. Get your hand off that rifle, sonny, and travel back to the ranch."

"Blasted varmints!" said Cam, roweling his horse and making it rear and plunge. "We aim to make it mighty hot for you before you're a week older, Mr. Kansas Johnson."

"Never you mind, Cam," said Walt. "Go on."

"Ain't going," said Cam. "If they take a notion to shoot you in the back, I want to be along to witness the demise."

"Get going!" shouted Walt, rising in his stirrups and striking at Cam with his quirt.

"I don't take that kindly, Walt," said Cam, turning his horse and starting away.

Wayt rode over to Walt and took his revolver but allowed him to keep his rifle in its scabbard under his left knee in case they ran into any of Geronimo's warriors. Deadwood put away his Winchester and rode up close to Walt. Wayt rode behind them, his leg over the pommel, rolling a cigarette.

"Wayt," said Walt, "what I want to know is, who shot my bay horse?"

"I did," said Wayt.

"Well, well," said Walt, "if these Johnsons ain't getting mighty rough on horse flesh. Yes sir. I reckon they're aiming to depopulate the country of horses and men."

"We're aiming to keep order," said Wayt. "We're aiming to jail every cowboy who looks like shooting up the town and breaking the peace."

Walt laughed.

"Beings I'm a truthful man, Wayt," said Walt, "I'll tell you something. Nary a shot did I fire. No sir. I don't waste ammunition that way. When I shoot off my six-gun I'm aiming to hit something, preferably a long galoot that goes by the name of Johnson."

"Shut your mouth," said Deadwood.

"And furthermore," said Walt, "according to law, you ain't got no right coming out here on the range after me nohow. You ain't no sheriff and you ain't no deputy sheriff. You're just a cantankerous feller that don't know when he's well off."

When they rode into the edge of town a bunch of cowboys were waiting for them and followed them down Main Street, talking and laughing. One of them rode up to Wayt and flourished a newspaper.

"Read that, Mr. Johnson," he said; "read it and get some enlightenment."

Wayt took the paper and glanced at it.

"Alkali suffering under misrule of peace officers . . . cowboy's horse, a valuable animal, callously shot down on Main Street . . . Dodge City methods of two-gun enforcement deplorable . . . citizens actually endangered by reckless peace officers."

Wayt handed the paper back to the cowboy, then Deadwood rode up between them, forcing the cowboy to the sidewalk.

"Get going," said Deadwood.

"Curious," said Walt, putting his hand on Wayt's shoulder; "curious thing they'd misjudge you that way, Mr. Johnson. Yes sir. It's plumb unjust."

When they dismounted in front of Justice Williams' office a crowd had collected and the cowhands rode among the citizens, talking and laughing. Brant White and Luther were sitting on a bench in front of the office. Walt walked over to them, nodding and smiling.

"Well, well," he said, "reënforcements, as I live."

Wayt took Walt by the arm and led him into the

Justice's office. Deadwood, Luther, and Brant followed them in and stood with their backs to the wall.

"Howdy, Henry," said Walt, going over to Justice Williams, "how are you?"

"All right, Walt," said Williams; "sit down."

"Well," said Luther, "there he is. Mr. Wingett says you're aiming to bust up this hell-raising in the city, and here's your chance."

There was a knock at the door and Deadwood opened it. Fin Elder came in, followed by George Stanley.

"Hear ye," said Williams, "this court is now declared ready for business. Walter Northrup what have you got to say for yourself."

"Wait a minute," said Fin Elder.

"What do you want, Fin?" demanded Williams, looking over his glasses.

"As sheriff of San Miguel County," said Fin, swelling out his chest, "I stand for law and order, as you all know. But I feel it's my duty to protest against the arresting of this here Walter Northrup. It is unlegal and not according to law nohow. Wayt Johnson is acting as emergency deputy to the town marshal and he's overstepping his author-

ity when he takes a man from the open range and brings him in here for trial."

"Granted," said Williams, nodding several times. "Walter Northrup you are released from custody, as you were arrested illegally and not according to law." Walt got up, smiling and staring at the Johnsons. "Marshal Johnson," the Justice went on, "rearrest this man."

Luther put his hand on Walt's shoulder and pushed him back into his seat. Walt's smile disappeared and his face became contorted with rage.

"Putting it up on me, are you!" he cried. "Just let me get my hands on a gun and I'll learn some of you fellers what all this law and order palavering is about!"

"Walter Northrup," said Williams, "you are hereby fined fifty dollars for disturbing the peace, and you are hereby notified that the fine must be paid at once or this court will be forced to incarcerate you in the city jail until same is paid."

Walt jumped to his feet, took out a roll of bills, and peeled off five tens, then he put on his hat.

"Henry Williams," said Fin Elder, "I'm surprised at you, playing into the hands of these Johnsons. I reckon you ain't seen the paper."

"I've seen it," said Williams, "and I hereby serve notice on you, Sheriff Elder, that from now on law and order is established in this here town and we aim to enforce it."

"You ain't heard the last of us, nohow," said Walt, pushing past Deadwood and opening the door. "No man can shoot my horses and make me like it, no sir!"

Fin Elder put on his hat, glared at the Johnsons and went out, followed by George Stanley.

Justice Williams took off his glasses, wiped them, then offered Wayt his hand.

"Wayt Johnson," he said, shaking his hand, "I'll be truthful with you. I ain't been playing the game according to the rules nohow, as I was figuring all along that you and your brothers wasn't doing nothing but desiring to kick up particular hell in this community. I've changed my mind, Wayt, and I'm aiming to go along with you. Yes sir. Mr. Wingett made me see the light and I'm mighty thankful to him for it."

"Thanks, Mr. Williams," said Wayt.

Deadwood opened the door and Brant went out, followed by Wayt and then Deadwood. Luther lingered to shake hands with Justice Williams, who

had antagonized him ever since he had been appointed town marshal.

"I'm powerful glad we got straightened out, Mr. Williams," said Luther. "I never could figure out why you was throwing in with them cattle thieves."

"A misunderstanding, Luther," said Williams; "just a plain ordinary misunderstanding."

Wayt, Brant and Deadwood stood talking on the sidewalk in front of the Golden Girl, waiting for Luther. A crowd was collecting on the corner across the street and finally Brant raised his arm and pointed.

"Looky there, Wayt," he said. "Don't that look like trouble to you?"

"Maybe," said Wayt. "But I hope they don't aggravate me too much as I've had about all I can swallow for one day."

"Yes sir," said Deadwood. "Them cowhands are getting mighty forward and fresh with you, boss."

"Just as I say," said Brant. "Some of them fellers want killing and they'll never be satisfied till they get it."

Just as Luther came up Poe Northrup bolted out of the Transcontinental Hotel and was half way

across the street before he saw Wayt. His hat was off and his hair was bristling.

"Steady," said Wayt to his men; "don't spoil all our good work by getting fractious. Leave this shorthorn to me."

"If he touches his gun he's a dead man," said Brant.

Poe stopped in the middle of the street, then he crooked a finger in the direction of Wayt.

"Mr. Johnson number one," he said, "I'd like to have a couple words with you private. Just step right out here in the middle of the street where we can all keep an eye on you, as I ain't aiming to get shot from that distance nohow."

Wayt walked to within six feet of Poe and stopped. Men poured out of the Golden Girl and the Transcontinental, windows were opened all along the street and a dead hush fell on the town. This was what they had all been looking for.

"Wayt," said Poe, "here's a little proposition that I want you to think over, but you got to think it over mighty sudden, as I ain't aiming to give you much time to ponder. If this runkus of ours ain't settled in jig time there's going to be a heap of kill-

ing and you know it. Now here's what I say: let's settle it man to man, once and for all, here in broad daylight. Walk ten paces backward and when I count three get out your gun and go to work. Ain't that a fair and square proposition?"

Wayt's face was twitching, but he said:

"No; I ain't making no fool plays, Poe."

"Yellow!" shouted Poe, dancing with rage.

"I'll take you!" cried Brant White. "You can't come sashaying in front of me that way."

Fin Elder suddenly jumped out of the crowd in front of the Transcontinental and seized Poe from behind. Luther grabbed Brant and held him. Men from both sides crowded out into the street, shouting and gesticulating. In front of the Palace Dance Hall a cowhand and a miner began pummeling each other and rolling on the ground. George Stanley jerked them to their feet and made them shake hands. Poe Northrup was dragged into the hotel through a crowd of sympathizers.

Wayt's face was pale and haggard.

"The dirty skunk!" he said.

Deadwood took hold of his arm and tried to say something to him, but he jerked away and went into the Golden Girl and up to his room.

"I never seen Wayt so riled," said Luther, uneasily. "They provoke him too far and God help 'em. He's the killingest human you ever seen when he opens up."

Brant was still flushed with rage.

"They've throwed themselves up to me for the last time," he said. "Wayt or no Wayt, I'm killing me a Northrup at the next opportunity."

"Listen to Wayt, Brant," said Luther. "Do what he says and play his game. Don't go back on him, Brant. If they get him started once all hell can't stop him and that would be the end of Wayt as sheriff."

Brant said nothing but went back into the Golden Girl with Luther and stood with his eyes lowered while a bunch of men crowded round asking for particulars. Deadwood took his rifle out of its scabbard and sat down on a bench with it across his knees.

About two hours later Walt and Poe Northrup and Joe Tod came out of the Transcontinental, climbed on their horses and rode off in the direction of Elderville, followed by half a dozen cowhands.

V

About ten o'clock Wayt borrowed Deadwood's horse and rode south on Main Street till he came to the White Front Saloon, then he turned east on Huston, which cut Main diagonally at the southern edge of town, and took the Old Trail for the Painter Creek ford. When he was tired, when things had been happening too fast and he was under a tension, he liked to ride out into the desert at night and just sit. It tranquilized him.

The moon was coming up now, big and full, and the jagged summit of Mount Silver was outlined against it, black and formidable. Away off to the south coyotes were yapping. Wayt sat with his leg over the pommel, looking across the desert. Suddenly he straightened up in his saddle. Over to the right in the direction of the bottom lands near Big Bend, he heard horsemen, faintly at first, then more clearly. He unsheathed his rifle and sat waiting, as he had heard that one of Geronimo's bands had been seen that day ten miles south of Alkali.

But presently he heard the creaking of saddles and then a voice speaking in Spanish. He turned his horse's head and rode toward the voice. In the moonlight he saw two men, one with a rifle slung across his back.

"Who is it?" he called.

There was a pause, then a pleasant voice inquired:

"Is that you, Señor Johnson?"

"It's me," said Wayt. "What are you doing riding out this way, Luis?"

"I am with my friend Rafael Orante," said El Guero. "We are going into town."

Wayt rode up to them.

"Rafael," he said, "where's your brother Ramon?"

"Ramon?" said Rafael. "How do I know?"

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No," said Rafael. "We do not speak since he left my sister."

"All right," said Wayt; "go ahead."

El Guero turned in his saddle.

"Today I see your brother, señor," he said. "He was in Holmesburg at The Nugget."

"Who was he with?" Wayt demanded.

"With? With nobody," said El Guero.

Wayt said nothing. El Guero and Rafael rode on. When they were nearly out of sight, El Guero began to sing in a high, clear tenor.

"Angel de armor, tu pasion no la comprendo,
Si la comprendo, no la puedo espresar,
Voy enceler tu languido gemido . . ."

He broke off and said something to Rafael that Wayt couldn't hear, then they both burst out laughing.

Wayt was worried and sat for a long time looking off over the desert. If Rafael had any information likely to injure Jimmy he'd certainly tell El Guero, and Wayt knew what use El Guero would make of it.

"Things's surely moving along," said Wayt.

VI

THE day the ordinance went into effect Wayt was out of town hunting for Jimmy, so Luther deputized Brant, Deadwood and Smith Sanders. They patrolled the city in pairs: Luther and Brant, Deadwood and Smith. Every man entering town with a gun was forced to deposit it at a bar or a restaurant or with Luther, and strangers, who had heard rumors of how tough Alkali was, stared and swore when they were relieved of their guns. Men with rifles in saddle-scabbards weren't molested. Shooting in a town was seldom done with rifles. The ordinance was aimed (ostensibly) at the two-gun men, most of whom never used a rifle at all. In reality the ordinance was the strongest weapon the Johnsons had yet got hold of in their war with the cowboys and the lawless element.

At the corner of Main and Bonanza two cowhands, who had been drinking, made trouble for Deadwood and Smith, and one of them tried to draw his gun, but Deadwood knocked him down

with his fist and he and Smith hustled both of them off to Justice Williams. They were fined fifty apiece on the spot and sentenced to twenty-four hours in jail. Luther and Brant had no trouble at all during the day, but about ten o'clock in attempting to disarm four men in the White Front Saloon, Brant was knocked unconscious by a bullet fired accidentally in the scuffle. The bullet's trajectory was upward at a slight angle, and it barely touched Brant near the temple. The four men, seeing Brant fall to the floor and fearing arrest on a murder charge, made a dash for the door, but Luther fired, hitting one of them in the foot, and the others stopped and raised their hands.

Brant was carried to a back room where cold water brought him around.

"Jumping rattlesnakes!" he said, "a bullet surely has got a wicked kick to it, like an army mule."

Three of the men were taken to jail, the other to the hospital. They were from the Joe Elder Mine and they threatened Luther with the sheriff, Joe Elder's nephew, but Luther laughed at them.

Six men in all were arrested and all of them were fined and received jail sentences. The next day the Alkali *Courier,* the *Herald's* rival, until recently

neutral in the Johnson-cowboy feud, carried a long account of the first day's enforcement, praising Luther Johnson for his work and definitely allying itself with the Johnson cause.

About midnight of the day following the clean up, Wayt came into the Golden Girl and went back to the table where Ed Deal was acting as look-out at the faro game.

"Just get in?" asked Deal.

"Yes," said Wayt. "Any news?"

"Six men jailed," said Deal.

"Good," said Wayt. "Any of the Tods or Northrups show up?"

"Not that I know of," said Deal, handing him a copy of the *Courier*.

Wayt thanked him and went out into Main Street and stood leaning against a lamp-post staring at the crowd and reading the paper. In a little while Luther and Brant came up to him. Brant had a bandage around his head under his hat.

"Wayt," he said, grinning, "you almost got yourself a chance to work as a pall-bearer. Yes sir. A bullet lashed out at me in passing and knocked me flat."

"How about Jim?" Luther inquired.

"He's in hiding some place," said Wayt. "I can't find hide nor hair of him. I'm going to have to give it up, I reckon."

"Maybe he's left the country," said Brant.

"I hope so," said Wayt.

Brant and Luther went into the Golden Girl and Wayt strolled down Main Street to Huston and then stopped in front of the Great Western Theatre and stood watching the crowd going in. The citizens' greetings were uniform: "Evening, Mr. Johnson." But the cowhands and the men from Elderville looked the other way or stared at Wayt without speaking.

After a while Will Price took hold of Wayt's arm.

"Figuring on going in, Wayt?" he asked. "They tell me they got some bang-up singers and dancers."

"Might," said Wayt. "Are you going in?"

"I was aiming to."

Wayt bought the tickets and they went in and took seats at a table near the back. At the far end, through a thick haze of tobacco smoke, they could see the stage with its kerosene footlights. A red-headed woman in a pink dress was singing a song about the pangs of love and demonstrating her

anguish by making faces or pressing her hands to her heart. Several women were moving about in the audience selling pictures of themselves in tights and begging the men to buy them just one little drink. From time to time some too enterprising miner or cowhand was slapped to the accompaniment of howls of laughter from his friends.

"Don't it beat all," said Wayt, "what some critters consider fun?"

"Yes sir," said Will Price, "it sure does."

Wayt took whiskey, Will Price beer, and they sat looking off through the tobacco haze at the antics on the stage and the antics in the audience.

"Wayt," said Will Price, finally, "I was talking to John Hummel over at the Holmesburg Stage Station and he was telling me they was expecting a big shipment in tomorrow."

"Money?" asked Wayt, leaning forward slightly.

"Money's no name for it," said Will; "eighty-thousand dollars."

"You don't tell me," said Wayt, taking out a cigar and pushing back his hat. "Extra guards?"

"Don't reckon so," said Will; "not that I've heard of. But Jud Burt ain't never had no trouble yet. A quick man with a gun."

"A good man," said Wayt.

They sat in silence, watching a blacked-up man and a real negress dancing a cakewalk. The negress was wearing a red silk dress with red stockings and the men in the front of the house were applauding loudly and calling to her.

"I suppose you seen the *Courier*," said Will.

"Yes," said Wayt; "right nice write up. Luther deserves it."

"I'm aching to see you boys clean up this town," said Will. "You'd be surprised if you knew how many decent citizens you had pulling for you, Wayt."

After a second whiskey Wayt got up, said good night to Will, and went out. It was after one o'clock and the streets were nearly deserted, though the saloons and dance halls were full. Wayt went into the Golden Girl and called one of the bartenders.

"Bob," he said, "tell Ed to get me up about five o'clock, will you?"

"Yes sir," said the bartender.

Wayt went up to his room and took off his coat and shoes. He unloaded his Winchester, oiled it and put the cartridges back in it; then he rolled up in a blanket and went to sleep.

VII

When Wayt left the Golden Girl and started toward the North End Corral, Alkali was just waking up. Although the sun had not yet cleared Mount Silver, it was no longer night. Early lights were appearing in the windows along Main Street, smoke was rising from the breakfast fires, and the huge sweep of cloud over Mount Silver was changing from gray to yellow. There was a pale radiance in the streets, and the morning wind, which sprang up every day near sunrise, was warm with the promise of another hot day. Little by little the houses lost the indeterminate gray of twilight and began to stand out more distinctly; objects began to take on their proper colors; over beyond the Great Western Theatre a rooster was crowing.

Wayt saw the smoke rising from the chimney of the blacksmith's shop next door to the corral, and, pushing open the door, he went in. Justin, the smith, was already at work; his shirt sleeves rolled up, his leather apron round him, and the glow from the forge in his face.

"Morning, Justin," said Wayt.

"Morning, Wayt. Early bird ain't you?"

"Yes," said Wayt, "up ahead of myself this morning. Got some business to tend to down Elderville way. I'll have a job for you when I get back."

"The gelding having trouble with his shoes?" asked Justin, putting a short bar of iron into the forge and pumping the bellows.

"He's some ouchy," said Wayt.

"Bring him in," said Justin; "I'll fix him smooth as silk."

Wayt rolled a cigarette and stood watching the smith. He liked Justin. You could be in his company without talking. He was as silent as Luther and would work for hours without speaking. He hardly ever ventured a comment but spoke only when spoken to. He was a big man, well over six feet tall, with shoulders as broad as an ox and a big head with a shock of coarse black hair standing up on it. He had been a blacksmith in the Union Army.

Justin drew the iron bar, red hot now, from the coals of the forge and began to shape it with his hammer. Wayt stood watching the fiery red of the iron change to dull blue. It reminded him of Kan-

sas. That was one reason he liked to come to the shop. As soon as he saw the forge-fire, heard the ringing of the iron, smelled the strange smithy odor, a mingling of singed hoofs, heated leather, horse manure and hot iron, Kansas was before his eyes and the little cross roads where Pop Dugmore's blacksmith shop used to stand. He would see Pa Johnson driving up with his bay work team; he would see Jimmy with bright gold hair standing with his hands on his hips watching the smith, and Luther in jean pants held up by a single strap riding a work horse whose harness was loose and jingling; and, beyond the shop, stretching in all directions limitlessly, the flat, immeasurable Kansas prairie. When he was alone he thought about Kansas a good deal; not that he was homesick, not that he ever wanted to see it again; but it was a pleasant memory.

"Well," said Wayt, "I'll be going."

"So long," said Justin.

It was light in the street now and the upper rim of the sun, already bright and hot, was just edging itself up over Mount Silver.

At the corral a sleepy hostler saddled Wayt's gelding for him; he slid his Winchester into his

saddle-scabbard and rode off in the direction of Holmesburg. No one knew where he was going, not even Luther. He had told them all that he had business in Elderville and as he did a good deal of riding in the county no one questioned him. At the edge of town an ox cart driven by a Mexican blocked his way.

"Get out of the middle of the road," Wayt shouted, as his horse shied and danced.

The Mexican drew his cart to the side of the road, then he took off his hat.

"Señor Johnson is up early this morning," he said.

"Got a little business," said Wayt.

The Mexican smiled.

"I am Jose Orante," he said.

"All right," said Wayt, "I ain't disputing it. But it 'pears to me there's a heap of Orantes in these parts."

"Si," said Jose. "Señor, for a silver dollar I will tell you something."

But Wayt had fixed his eyes on the cart. It was filled with straw and Wayt thought he saw the straw moving.

"Who's in that cart?" he demanded, riding over and digging into the straw with his quirt.

A man sat up. He had a bloody bandana around his head covering his eyes.

"It is I," said the man, "Rafael Orante. They have killed me."

Wayt got up in his stirrups and looked around him, but there was no one in sight.

"Señor," said Rafael, "Jimmy will be killed. You are too late."

"What's that?" Wayt demanded, leaning over and staring at Rafael.

"He will help them and then he will be killed. Ramon also."

"The Holmesburg stage?" asked Wayt.

"Si," said Rafael, then he bent over and put his hand to his side. "Get me home, Jose," he cried, "I want to die at home."

"Where will they meet the stage?" demanded Wayt, shaking Rafael.

"At the Coyote Creek ford," said Rafael. "Señor, avenge me. Kill El Guero."

Wayt spurred his horse and started off at a gallop. The sun was clear of Mount Silver now and

Wayt felt its heat. The flat land lost its grayness and patches of sand began to sparkle. He left the road a mile out of town, guided his gelding down into a dry creek bed, and put the spurs to him. As he approached a deep arroyo, he rode up into the plain above the creek bed and cut across the Holmesburg road, and into a dense mesquite thicket beyond which was an old Apache trail. He followed the trail for half an hour, until the yellow buttes of the Red Hills began to tower and he could see the deep crevices and fissures on Mount Silver. The sun had climbed and an intense heat closed down on the desert. The gelding was lathered and blowing, but Wayt used his quirt mercilessly and, from time to time, his spurs. He rode through another mesquite thicket, and the trail took a sudden turning at a place where there was a rise of rocky ground topped by a giant cactus. Wayt reined in and stood up in his stirrups. He was certain he had heard a horse snorting. Far to the east he saw a line of green wavering in the heat: Coyote Creek. He was in good time as the stage wouldn't reach the ford for about an hour. As he was putting his watch away, he heard the snorting again, quite near, followed by a man's cursing. A horseman was ap-

proaching just beyond the rise in the trail. Wayt got out his Winchester, then spurred his horse up the rocky rise. A man in a blue shirt with a rifle slung across his back was urging his tired horse to make the climb. Wayt recognized the horse and rider.

"Jimmy," he called.

Jim reached for his revolver but his hand stopped half way.

"Wayt!" he cried, spurring his horse up the rise.

Wayt jumped from his horse, threw the reins over its head, and led Jim's horse up to the top of the rise.

"Well," said Wayt, pulling at his mustache.

"I was wrong, Wayt," said Jim, his face contorted; "you was right. I should've listened to you, Wayt. Now I got to leave the country. If the sheriff don't get me, Red Harness will."

"Now, now," said Wayt. "Who shot Rafael Orante?"

"El Guero, the dirty skunk. He shot him in the back. He never give him a chance."

"What for?"

"Well," said Jim, already calmer now that he was with Wayt, "Rafael was afraid of that stage

job. He tried to get Ramon to go home with him."

"Why didn't El Guero finish him off?"

Jim stared at Wayt.

"Ain't Rafael dead?"

"No," said Wayt; "he's in Alkali. His brother brung him in."

"We just left him laying there," said Jim. "El Guero thought he was dead."

Wayt rolled a cigarette and stood thinking.

"Who's left on the stage job?" he asked.

"Red Harness, a feller called Mike Foster, El Guero and Ramon," said Jim. Then, half crying, he went on: "I lit out, Wayt. I couldn't stand all that killing. I ain't the killing kind, Wayt. I ain't got the stomach for it."

"Good," said Wayt.

"But they'll get me, Wayt," said Jim. "They're never going to let me run loose with all I know."

"Now, now," said Wayt.

Jim got down from his horse and they stood looking off toward Coyote Creek. Great waves of heat passed over the sandy plain, and the Red Hills seemed to be moving and swaying like objects seen through water. Southward buzzards were soaring above an arroyo.

"Well," said Wayt, "I'm going to see you through, Jimmy. Jud Burt'll have to look out for himself on that stage business. I can't get mixed up in it now. Not by a damn sight with you in the fix you're in."

"I ain't worth it, Wayt," said Jim.

"Tut," said Wayt. "Get on your horse. We're going over to Elderville. I'm on business over there and I met you casual-like. You're going on back to Alkali with me."

They climbed on their horses and turned their heads to the south.

"We got to make time," said Wayt, "so there won't be no chance of you being in on that hold up."

They rode in silence. From time to time Jim glanced at his brother, wanting to thank him, wanting to tell him what a great fellow he was, but he knew that Wayt would be embarrassed, so he said nothing. All his fears had disappeared. He no longer had to think of surviving; he no longer had the pain of willing his own actions and taking the consequences. He had Wayt now.

Without pushing their tired horses too hard they made Elderville in an hour and went into the Silver Mine Restaurant.

"Howdy, Mr. Johnson," said the proprietor. "How's things over in the metropolis?"

"Fine," said Wayt, taking out his watch. "Damn it all!" he exclaimed, "if I didn't get roped in when I bought this here chronometer! What time you got, Harry?"

The proprietor took out his watch, a huge, gold one an inch thick and stared at it, pursing his lips.

"Well, sir," he said, "in twenty seconds it'll be exactly fifteen after seven."

"You're sure that's right, are you?" Wayt demanded.

"Plumb certain," said the proprietor, tapping his watch with his forefinger. "That there watch don't vary one minute in a year. No sir. They run Elderville by that there watch."

"Good," said Wayt.

Jim ate without speaking, stuffing his mouth full and taking his coffee in gulps. Wayt ate slowly, watching everybody who came in the restaurant. When they were through, Wayt said:

"Now we'll play ourselves a game of pool."

PART III

I

As Wayt and Jim came into Alkali along the Old Trail, they met Cactus, the miner, riding his spavined and bony black horse and leading his burro.

"Howdy, Wayt," said Cactus. "All hell's a-popping in town. The Holmesburg stage was held up and Jud Burt and Mr. Thompson is killed dead."

"You don't say," said Wayt. "How much did they get?"

"Didn't get nothing," said Cactus. "Old Bob put the whip to his horses I reckon and left 'em behint. Mighty funny goings on, yes sir!"

"It beats all," said Wayt. "Ain't that so, Jim?"

Jim nodded.

"Yes sir. It beats all," said Cactus. "Well, I'll be traveling. So long, boys."

Cactus clucked to his horse and started off, but his burro planted its feet and balked. Wayt took a cut at it with his quirt and the burro kicked back, then ambled on, calm as ever.

"That burro needs a heap of starting," said Cactus, "but he gets there."

Wayt and Jim rode in silence till they were abreast of the White Front Saloon, then Wayt said:

" 'Pears like them fellers don't know their business, shooting up a couple of citizens and getting nothing. It's a wonder El Guero wouldn't shoot a lead horse."

"Them's desperate men," said Jim. "I'm all-fired glad I'm shut of 'em. Red Harness is a sure enough killer."

"Tut," said Wayt.

"Wayt," said Jim, "it ain't right me going free like this with men dead."

Wayt turned in his saddle and stared at Jim.

"Will you shut your mouth," he said. "As a deputy marshal I'm in as deep as you are, so shut your mouth."

As they dismounted in front of the Golden Girl, they saw the crowd at the end of Main Street swarming around the stage. Old Bob, the driver, was standing on the roof, haranguing the crowd.

"Look," said Jim, pointing.

"Never you mind," said Wayt, and taking Jim

by the arm he led him up the steps and into the saloon.

The bar was deserted and there was only one bartender on duty.

"Heard the news?" called Ed Deal, from the far end of the bar; then recognizing Jim, he said: "Hello, Jimmy. When'd you blow in?"

"I ran onto him over in Elderville," said Wayt. "He 'lows he's had enough of lone-handing it. He's going to locate in Alkali again."

"That so?" said Deal.

"Yes sir," said Jim. "I'm plumb lonesome."

"Where's Brant?" asked Wayt.

"Down to the stage," said Deal. "Them varmints killed old Jud Burt and him with nary a bullet in his hide in all his born days."

"Killed Mr. Thompson too, I hear," said Wayt.

"Yes," said Deal; "it's a lynching matter and God help them fellers if they get 'em."

"Forming a posse?" asked Wayt.

"Don't know."

"Come on, Jimmy," said Wayt.

They left the Golden Girl and walked down Main Street toward the crowd. Men called to Wayt as he passed, telling him what had happened. When

they came up to the crowd, Old Bob was just climbing down from the stage. He saw Wayt.

"There he is," he shouted; "there's Wayt Johnson."

Wayt was surrounded in a minute by an angry, eager, gesticulating crowd. They begged him to head a posse and exterminate the hold-up men. Mr. Dixon put his arm around Wayt and shouted:

"Here's your man, folks. Here's the man that will find 'em for you."

There was a shout. Brant White, Luther and Deadwood pushed their way through the crowd.

"Wayt," said Brant, "it's up to you. Fin Elder took the train for Tucson this morning on a case."

"All right," said Wayt. "I'm your man."

There was another shout and when Wayt started for the Golden Girl with Jim, Brant, Deadwood and Luther, he was followed by the whole crowd which filled the street from sidewalk to sidewalk.

"Jim," said Luther, "where in hell you been?"

"I met him in Elderville this morning," said Wayt. "He's aiming to stay with us now, Luther, and take things up just where he left off."

"I got lonesome," said Jim. "I was heading for home when I seen Wayt."

"Good," said Luther.

Brant put his arm around Jim.

"Yes sir," said Brant; "this camp ain't the same with one Johnson missing."

Wayt and his men stopped in front of the Golden Girl and Wayt got up on a bench.

"Folks," he shouted, "I'm aiming to take Deadwood, Brant White and Jimmy, and I'm looking for a couple of volunteers, so make up your minds who's going."

He got down and went into the saloon, followed by his men and all of the crowd that could get in. But there were no volunteers. Trailing men in the country round Alkali was not easy. There was not only the terrific heat and the wide stretches of waterless land, but Apaches. A man had to be resourceful and saddle-hardened, and even in the excitement of the moment, when everybody was shouting for revenge, no one stepped forward, but many urged their friends to go.

"Kind of a scarcity of volunteers 'pears like," said Brant. Then turning to Ed Deal, he said: "Ed, how

about you making one with us. I heard you making a sight of war talk and such a while back."

"My back's bothering me," said Ed. "I couldn't stand an hour in the saddle."

"Reckon there's a lot of sore backs hereabouts," said Brant.

While they were talking Joe Tod and El Guero pushed their way to the bar. When Jim saw El Guero he started back, but Wayt, making a sudden forward movement, trod on his toes with his heavy boots.

"God almighty," said Jim, bending over and taking his foot in his hand; "you near paralyzed me."

"Sorry, Jimmy," said Wayt.

"Wayt Johnson," said Joe Tod, "we hear you're making war talk about ketching these here road agents and you're looking for volunteers."

"That's right," said Wayt.

"Well, here we are," said Joe. "Luis and me can go any place a Johnson can go."

"Get your guns. We're starting directly," said Wayt, turning his back.

"Luis's a good trailer," said Joe.

"I got a trailer," said Wayt: "Deadwood."

"Well," said Joe, "maybe Luis can help, ain't that so?"

"Maybe," said Wayt.

"I don't like this," Brant whispered to Wayt, but Wayt shook his head slightly.

When all the arrangements had been made, Wayt took Brant, Luther, Jim and Deadwood into a back room.

"Now, boys," he said, "being's I'm running this outfit, I want to give you some orders. First, don't pick no quarrels with Joe Tod; let him have his way as far as possible. He's just aiming to annoy us. Second, I ain't looking for these road agents and I ain't aiming to find 'em." Luther and Deadwood whistled and stared at Wayt, but Brant glanced sharply at Jim, who was looking at the floor. "I ain't answering no questions right now, but I want you boys to do as I say. If we should happen to run up on these fellers, kill 'em and no palavering. I don't want ary one of 'em alive." Luther and Deadwood both turned and looked at Jim, who fidgeted, then took out his gun and sat whirling the cylinder. "Now you understand me. Anything to say?"

"I'll lead 'em off trail," said Deadwood.

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"You leave the killing to me," said Brant.

"Good," said Wayt. "Now, Luther, I want you in town. No telling what'll happen."

Wayt got up and stood rolling a cigarette. The others sat avoiding each other's eyes. There was a long silence.

Finally Jim burst out:

"What you looking at me for, Brant White! I didn't have nothing to do with them killings."

"Tut," said Wayt. "Who's accusing you?"

"I left 'em," said Jim, looking from one to the other; "I'm telling you, I left 'em count I didn't have no stomach for all that killing. I ain't aiming to hide nothing from you fellers."

"Never you mind," said Brant.

They all got to their feet and followed Wayt out into the bar. Most of the crowd had dispersed, the poker games were going as usual, and the bar was doing a good business. El Guero was standing at the end of the bar, smoking a cigarette. Wayt went over to him.

"Where's Joe Tod?"

"At Mr. Dixon's," said El Guero, smiling and showing his teeth. "He wants a new Winchester."

"We're starting, Luis," said Wayt. "Better go get him."

"Which way are we going?" said El Guero, staring insolently at Wayt.

Wayt came up close to him and took hold of his arm.

"Luis," he said, "if you ever open your mouth, I'll kill you."

"We understand each other, señor," said El Guero.

II

THE posse had been out three days and Wayt was still driving them. Deadwood had picked up the trail of the highwaymen at the ford and they had followed it steadily for nearly twenty-four hours, till it was crossed southeast of Big Bend by a herd of cattle and obliterated. Deadwood pretended to pick it up about a mile south of where they had lost it, and since then they had all followed Deadwood's lead. It was late morning when Deadwood pretended to pick up the trail, and hot, and El Guero's horse was in a lather. He rode up beside Deadwood, smiling, and said: "Señor, since we understand each other, why not lay up till night?"

Deadwood turned in his saddle and sat looking at the Mexican.

"Luis," he said, "you'll have to see the boss about that. But what I don't savvy about this here trail is that pacing horse leaving the ford all by his lonesome and hitting for town. That's a pacing horse you're riding."

El Guero laughed.

"Ask Señor Johnson," he said.

Wayt hardly spoke except to answer questions. Brant was restive in his saddle, singing and rolling cigarettes, but Deadwood was as silent as Wayt, riding ahead of the party and keeping his eyes on the plain. Jim kept near Wayt and from time to time tried to talk to him. El Guero and Tod rode to one side of the others, talking in low tones.

Joe Tod was already sick of the business. Half drunk, he had been persuaded to join the posse by El Guero, merely to spite the Johnsons, and the first day he had enjoyed himself. But now he was weary and longed for the shade of the cottonwoods round his ranch and ease from the saddle. He didn't know anything about El Guero's part in the hold up, and he began to wonder why the Mexican insisted on harrying the posse, asking them questions, suggesting off trails, begging them to halt for a rest. Finally Joe said to him:

"Listen, Luis, I'm telling you, you better keep your mouth shut or you're going to get us both killed out here. I'm plumb fed up with this posse business."

"Don't worry," said El Guero.

It was a little past noon now and the sun was beating down on the posse. Sweat was pouring from under their hats, blinding them, and their horses were weary and needed water. Wayt squinted at the sun.

"Boys," he said, "with luck we ought to make Mesquite Springs 'fore nightfall, but go easy on what water you got left."

Joe rode up beside Wayt and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Wayt," he said, "ain't it about time we're turning back? We ain't going to see hide nor hair of them fellers. Like as not they've hit the state line 'fore this."

"We'll keep going for a spell yet," said Wayt, urging his horse away from Tod's. "Turn back yourself if you like."

"Not me!" said Joe. "You must figure I'm aiming to get myself killed. We're deep in Apache country."

Wayt said nothing, and Joe rode back and joined El Guero.

"Getting a little weary, are you, Joe?" said Brant. "Maybe you got a sore back like Ed Deal and a passel of other Alkali fire-eaters."

"Never mind," said Wayt.

They rode for half an hour in silence, then Deadwood turned in his saddle.

"Boss," he called, "I'm plumb stopped. I reckon we lost 'em."

"Well," said Wayt, "push on to Mesquite Springs and we'll take on water. My gelding needs water bad."

"Take my mare," said Jim, "and I'll lead the gelding."

"No," said Wayt, "I'll make out."

"A noble brother," said El Guero.

Deadwood had been acting under instructions. Wayt had told him to push them hard until the third day and then give up the trail. Wayt didn't want there to be any doubts about the thoroughness of the search, especially as he was certain that Joe Tod knew nothing about El Guero's hand in the hold up.

Joe took off his hat and wiped his brow with his sleeve.

"This here Arizona," he said, "is the nearest thing to hell there is."

The heat increased. Long lines of heat waves quivered over the desert. There was not a breath of wind. Far off to the northeast the Red Hills made a

long, yellow line on the horizon, and Mount Silver glistened, receded, danced in the heat shimmers. They rode up a long steep sand ridge between giant cactuses towering twenty feet above them, and struck the old Apache trail, a narrow pathway between naked red rocks. This trail led up to a small mesa with patches of mesquite thicket and a single cottonwood, old and gnarled, then down once more through boulders the size of houses and tall, twisted, red rocks, hot as a stove to the touch. Below the mesa they came out through a long narrow passage, where they could see nothing but a strip of the brazen sky, into Deadman's Flats, a desert sink, where long patches of naked sand alternated with great flakes of dried mud. Crossing the flats the heat was terrific and the riders drooped in their saddles. At the far edge, Deadwood picked up a trail. A little further along, they saw an abandoned canteen and a rifle, then Jim cried out and pointed to the buzzards circling.

They spurred their horses. El Guero rode up beside Wayt and said:

"Be careful, señor. We have found them by accident."

Wayt stared at him and then lifted his quirt. El

Guero raised his arm to avoid the blow and dug his spurs into his horse. Beyond a small sand ridge they saw the carcass of a horse, and Deadwood dismounted.

"Ain't been dead long," he said. "Died this minute; warm as he can be. Buzzards ain't had time to get to work."

El Guero found a man's footprints in the sand and, with a cry, put spurs to his horse, but Brant White overtook him and, followed by the rest of the posse, Deadwood bringing up the rear, they took a long, low ridge at a gallop and stopped at the highest point.

"There!" cried El Guero, pointing.

He unsheathed his rifle and got down from his horse. Brant followed him. Just below them, hatless, a big man was wandering about in the sand, waving his arms. His shirt was torn as if he had rushed unheeding through a thicket, and one of his boots was gone. It was Red Harness.

He saw the posse and cried out:

"Kill me! Kill me!"

El Guero's face was contorted and he swung his rifle to his shoulder, but Joe Tod, riding up, knocked it out of his hand.

"Luis!" called Red, coming toward them; then Brant fired three times.

Red took the shots full in the chest and fell headlong. Jim rode down beyond the ridge and sat shivering. Wayt and Deadwood sat impassive in their saddles.

"Jesus Christ!" shouted Joe. Then, turning to Wayt, his face livid, he said: "So that's your way, Mr. Kansas Johnson!"

"That's Joel King, the Texas outlaw," said Wayt, and, taking the handbill from his pocket, he handed it to Joe.

Brant and El Guero ran down the ridge to the fallen man. When he heard them coming he raised his head, then dropped it.

"They left me," he said. "My horse was plumb tuckered, and they left me."

Joe Tod sat looking at the handbill.

"Big reward, I reckon," he said. "Had inside information, you and Luis, yes sir. Mighty funny business."

Turning, Brant shouted to Wayt:

"He's dead, Wayt."

El Guero ran back up the ridge and put his hand on Joe's stirrup.

"You lost for me that reward," he cried. "You knocked the gun out of my hand."

Joe laughed.

"Luis," he said, "won't you never learn that the Johnsons are too smart for us common cowhands."

Joe laughed again and rode down the ridge to join Jim, who was swaying in his saddle now, deathly pale.

"Luis," said Wayt, "the Johnsons ain't looking for none of this reward. You split it up with Brant and Deadwood."

"Si, si," said El Guero, smiling and twirling his mustache. "Thank you, señor."

They loaded the dead man on Brant's horse, and Brant walked. The rest rode along slowly in silence. It was dusk when they left the sandy plain and entered the hilly region around Mesquite Springs. The sun had set beyond the San Miguel Mountains, and the valley was dark, but the taller peaks were still glowing. The desert land was pale blue now, the sagebrush deep gray. Along the trail the giant cactuses rose black and formidable like enormous wayside crosses.

They made camp at Mesquite Springs and cooked supper. At moonrise El Guero and Joe Tod left

the posse and rode northward toward the Tod ranch. Deadwood and Brant stayed at the springs with the dead outlaw and Wayt and Jim started off toward Big Mesa to report the killing, to telegraph to Alkali, and to get a wagon and a teamster to cart the body into Big Mesa.

III

THE night of Wayt's return there was a celebration at the Golden Girl. Wayt was presented with a watch by a committee of citizens. Mr. Dixon, the gunsmith, then Marcus Wingett, made speeches, lauding Wayt for his merciless pursuit of the outlaws and the killing of the most important one. At the end of his speech, Wingett raised his glass and said:

"Boys, to the next sheriff of San Miguel County."

There was a prolonged clamor.

Wayt sat impassive, looking a little pale.

But Brant White was drunk, shouldering his way through the crowd, shouting and laughing, and bragging about having killed the notorious bad man, Joel King.

Jim and Luther sat in the back of the saloon with their chairs tipped against the wall, smoking.

"Wayt feels pretty bad with all this hullabaloo and shouting," said Luther. "Wayt's a square man and he ain't much for taking what he don't de-

serve. You're a mighty lucky feller to have a brother like that, Jimmy."

"I know," said Jim; then he put his hand on Luther's arm. "It was hell, Lute, killing him like that. Brant White ain't got no more heart than a rattlesnake."

"No," said Luther, "he ain't. But he's got guts, which is something."

Jim looked at Luther for a moment, then lowered his eyes and stared at his cigarette.

"Meaning I ain't," he said.

"Meaning what I say," said Luther. "We was talking about Brant White, son. You got to get over that touchiness and buckle down to business. 'Pears to me you ought to be considering yourself mighty lucky with Wayt taking the chances he is."

"I know," said Jim.

After the speeches were over and everybody that could get near Wayt had congratulated him and shaken his hand, the poker games were resumed, a crowd made a rush for Brant White's faro table, and the three bartenders, badgered nearly beyond endurance, were spilling liquor over the bar and colliding in their haste. Ed Deal stood at the far end of the bar with his hat tipped back, his thumbs

thrust into the armholes of his vest, and a big cigar in his teeth, telling a group of men how he had wanted to join the posse but that Wayt had made him stay behind and mind the business.

"Tonight being's this is a special occasion," shouted Brant, "I'll double the limit and, gents, I don't care if I win or lose. Fifty and twenty-five, she is gentlemen. Step right up and don't be backward."

Brant sat down at the box to deal, and Smith Sanders climbed up into the look-out's seat.

Wayt walked back to where Luther and Jim were sitting.

"Jim," he said, "get to work and help Ed Deal. I'm counting on you from now on."

Jim got up without a word and went over to the bar.

"Looking a little peaked, Wayt," said Luther.

"Just tired," said Wayt. "How's Jimmy?"

"The killing bothered him some," said Luther, "but I reckon he's all right."

"I had to take him," said Wayt.

Wayt stood leaning on the back of Luther's chair, looking off over the crowded saloon.

"Seen any of the Northrups or Tods?" he asked.

"No," said Luther; " 'pears like they've made themselves scarce."

"Good," said Wayt. Then, smiling, he went on: "Joe didn't take the killing kindly. I didn't figure him to be so chicken-hearted that way when he's done enough killing himself." He stopped and looked at the toes of his boots. "It wasn't a pretty sight."

Luther made a decided gesture.

"Just a skunk the less," he said.

Wayt stood there for a little while longer, neither of them speaking, then Wayt said:

"Tell Deadwood I took his horse. I'll be back directly."

When Wayt came out of the Golden Girl he saw El Guero lounging against the hitching rack talking to two other Mexicans. He had on his gunbelt and his gun was in its holster. Wayt went over to him.

"Luis," he said, "we ain't packing guns no more in Alkali."

El Guero smiled.

"Señor," he said, "I was just leaving."

"Well," said Wayt, "I'm watching you. Get on your horse and follow your nose, or take off that gun."

The other Mexicans had drawn away from Wayt and one of them took off his hat and stood turning it in his hands. El Guero lit his cigarette.

"I was just telling my compadres what good friends I am with you," said El Guero. "Amigos," he said to his friends, pointing at Wayt and then at himself. "Señor Johnson, amigo. Si?"

"I'm still watching you," said Wayt.

El Guero laughed, then he nodded to his friends, unhitched his horse and got into the saddle.

"Adios, amigo," he said, smiling at Wayt.

Then he struck his horse with his quirt and went off down Main Street at a gallop. As soon as he had gone, his two friends bowed to Wayt, then they hurried in the opposite direction, looking back from time to time.

Wayt rode south on Main Street and took his usual route past the White Front Saloon, east on Huston Street to the Old Trail. The moon was just coming up over the Red Hills and the desert turned from black to gray. He flung his leg over the pommel and let his horse amble. It was quiet now that he had got out of town; far southward coyotes were howling, but this was part of the silence. He pushed back his hat and sat looking at the stars.

IV

WAYT was sitting in a back room playing solitaire. It was nearly supper time and the saloon was quiet. From where he sat, Wayt could see the Transcontinental Hotel. There was a group of loungers sitting on a bench in front of it, whittling, talking and spitting into the street. For nearly a week the town had been as calm as the group in front of the Transcontinental. There had been but three arrests and all of them for drunkenness, two Mexicans and a miner from Elderville, all of whom were harmless enough but loud. A night in jail had quieted them. In an editorial one morning the *Courier* spoke of the sudden change in the life of Alkali and attributed it to the ordinance recently passed and to the Johnsons. But Wayt did not like it. The change was too marked; there was something behind it. Towns like Alkali, full of lawless men, do not become law-abiding and tranquil over night.

He mussed up his lay-out, tipped back his chair and rolled a cigarette. He recalled when he first

landed in Alkali. It was toward evening and cold. There was a great bonfire at the corner of Stonewall and Archer Streets, and a man was hanging from a telegraph pole. The Stranglers had hanged him for shooting a bartender. The town marshal had made no attempt to save the man; the sheriff had turned his back. That night he lay in his room at the Transcontinental listening to the street rows and the revolver shots coming from all directions. That was Alkali. In a year he and Luther had quieted the town, as they had quieted Dodge City. But it was no settled thing and he knew it. Violence was likely to break out at any time. Since the attempted stage robbery and the killing of Jud Burt and Mr. Thompson, things had been too placid.

He turned to look out the window. Poe Northrup had left the hotel, nodded to the group on the bench, and was crossing the street toward the Golden Girl. Wayt hadn't seen either a Tod or a Northrup for over a week. They had made themselves scarce. Brant White had seen Frame Tod and Walt Northrup in Elderville, but he told Wayt that they had been very friendly and had invited him to drink with them; too damn friendly, he said.

Wayt laid out a new game of solitaire and waited, as he was certain that Poe was looking for him. Poe usually did his drinking at the Transcontinental and the White Front; he seldom came to the Golden Girl. In a moment one of the bartenders opened the door and said:

"Poe Northrup wants to see you, boss."

"All right," said Wayt.

Poe came in, jingling his spurs, but minus his gun, his big hat on the back of his head, and his flannel shirt open at the throat.

"Howdy, Wayt," he said.

"Howdy, Poe," said Wayt. "Take a chair."

Poe sat down and propped his feet up on the table.

"Wayt," he said, "this surely is a changed town. Yes sir. Folks hereabouts are making right smart of talk about it. Old woolly Alkali is no more."

He laughed and began to roll a cigarette.

"A man can leave his gun behind and don't have to be fearful about ketching no lead in the back," Poe went on, "and that surely is some improvement. I recollect when a man wasn't safe noways in this town without a pair of guns and sharp eyes."

"What you getting at, Poe?"

Poe laughed.

"Wayt," he said, "I reckon you won't believe me when I tell you that we're aiming to put in with you. Yes sir. All this war talk is forgotten and we're aiming to be model citizens. In Alkali, of course. Elderville's another pair of shoes. Over there a man's got to keep up his reputation for hell-raising or be shot for a sissy. But in this here town we're aiming to go along with the law and order element and stay out of jail."

"Well?" said Wayt.

Poe pulled his hat down over his eyes and looked at Wayt.

"You ain't trusting me, are you?" he said.

"No."

"Now, now," said Poe; "if you ain't a cantankerous lot, you Johnsons. Joe Tod was just saying yesterday that he never seen such cantankerous and jumpy fellers as the Johnsons." Poe took his feet down from the table and leaned forward in his chair. "Wayt," he went on, "as a U. S. deputy marshal with a hankering after that sheriff's job you're interested in ridding this here community of varmints. As a cattleman with stock to lose I'm in the same general frame of mind. All right. To prove

to you where I stand, I'm willing to deliver up to you two prize varmints, providing you see 'em hanged 'cording to law and don't shoot 'em down like you shot Joel King."

"Brant shot him," said Wayt.

"Under instructions," said Poe, his face hardening.

"Well," said Wayt, calmly, "name the two varmints."

Poe leaned forward still farther and watched Wayt's face.

"Ramon Orante and Mike Foster," he said.

Wayt tossed away his cigarette and smiled.

"Them's the boys that shot Jud Burt and old man Thompson," said Poe, his eyes glowing. "Them's the boys that left Joel King out on Deadman's Flats. But we want 'em hanged 'cording to law, and not shot down like rattlesnakes."

"Mighty law-abiding, ain't you?" said Wayt.

Poe laughed.

"I reckon you don't want them fellers very bad," said Poe. "It might be a sight embarrassing to bring 'em back into Alkali. They might talk."

Poe and Wayt sat staring at each other.

"What game you playing, Poe?" asked Wayt.

"Game!" said Poe. "I ain't playing no game. It's you that's playing the game. I'm aiming to see justice done, that's all."

Wayt laughed.

"Poe," he said, "you fool around near the fire long enough and you'll get your mustache singed. If I was you I'd keep shut of the law and go back to my ranch peaceful-like. Somebody might ask you some embarrassing questions."

"Like what?" demanded Poe.

"Well," said Wayt, "like where you got that last bunch of cattle you changed the brands on. Or what was Mike Foster doing out to your place twenty-four hours before the killing of Jud Burt and Mr. Thompson."

Poe laughed but his face darkened.

"Yes," he said, "and supposing somebody was to ask you where that bull calf of a Jimmy Johnson was on the same day."

"I'd refer him to you," said Wayt.

Poe got to his feet.

"Supposing I talk," said Poe.

"Well," said Wayt, "I'll arrest you as a cattle thief and see that you get tried."

"And I'll fill you full of lead, Mr. Johnson," shouted Poe.

Wayt picked up his cards.

"Run along, Poe," he said. "I ain't joining hands with such as you and I ain't aiming to let you scare me a little bit."

Poe thought for a while and stood watching Wayt, who was laying out a new game of solitaire.

"Wayt," he said, finally, "I'll turn them varmints up to you to do as you see fitten providing I get the reward."

"Them fellers are on their way to Texas," said Wayt.

"I know," said Poe, "but I can get 'em back."

"No," said Wayt; "we can't do no business, Poe, as I wouldn't trust you round the corner."

Poe jammed his hat down to his ears and went out, slamming the door. Wayt saw him cross the street, stamping his boot heels into the ground, go into the hotel, come out with his gun strapped around him, and get on his horse. In front of the Palace Dance Hall he was joined by his brother and Frame Tod. Wayt watched them till they were out of sight, then he laid down his cards.

"I 'lowed it was too quiet," he said.

When Wayt came back from supper, he looked around the bar for Jim, then asked Ed Deal where he was.

"Out back somewhere," said Ed. "A Mexican came in here looking for him."

"Did you know him?"

"Well," said Ed, " 'pears to me like I do. I reckon it's one of them Orantes, but there's such a slew of 'em and all Mexicans look alike anyway, I ain't sure."

Wayt went out a side door into the passageway leading to the private rooms in the rear of the saloon. He walked carefully, but the boards creaked under him and he stopped and waited. In a room a stride further down the passage, he heard voices.

"No," Jim was saying, "no use talking nohow. Can't you get that through your head? I'm done with you, Remedios, plumb through, and you might just as well make tracks."

Remedios spoke in a low tone but insistently. Wayt put his ear to the wall, but couldn't make out what she was saying. Jim laughed.

"I know all about that, Remedios," he said. "Yes sir. You been about as true to me as you was to Joel King and a sight of other young fellers." A

chair was scraped across the floor, then overturned.

"But I am! I am!" cried Remedios.

Wayt opened the door and went in. Jim was sitting and Remedios was standing in front of him, crying. When she saw Wayt she jumped back and stood leaning against the wall.

"I couldn't help it, Wayt," said Jim.

"Remedios," said Wayt, "are you looking for trouble?"

"No, señor."

"Are you going to do what I tell you? Or do you want me to put you in jail?"

"In jail, señor?" cried Remedios.

"You get out of this place pronto and if you ever bother Jimmy again, I'm going to have Luther lock you up for disturbing the peace. Savvy? Now git!"

Remedios moved slowly toward the door but stopped and pointed at Jim.

"I love him, señor."

"Tut!" said Wayt.

Remedios lowered her eyes.

"I have no money," she said.

Wayt smiled.

"That sounds more likely." He took out his bill-

fold and gave her a ten. Her eyes brightened and she hid the money in the front of her dress.

"Thank you, señor," she said.

Wayt took her by the arm.

"Remedios," he said, "Jimmy hasn't got no money. When you got to have some funds come see me."

When she had gone, Wayt put his arm around Jim and they walked back into the bar.

"Jimmy," said Wayt, "when something like that comes up, run and tell me."

"I know," said Jim, "but I was figuring you'd think I wasn't playing the game square."

The evening crowd had begun to come into the Golden Girl and Jim went behind the bar to help the bartenders. Wayt went over and sat down at Brant's faro table to watch the play.

V

WAYT had just come in from a trip to Big Mesa. He had been gone for nearly a week. As soon as he arrived, Luther took him into a back room and told him that the city was ready for an outbreak, that the Northrups were in town almost every day, and that there were all sorts of rumors regarding the attempted stage robbery and the killing of the two men. Then he showed Wayt a clipping from the *Herald*. It read:

"Evidence in the hands of the authorities implicates four robbers and two accomplices. The killing of the ring leader, Joel King, has satisfied the citizens seemingly, but not the authorities. Arrests will follow as soon as everything is ready. Meanwhile it is certain that several men around Alkali, among them two who were participants in the pursuit of the robbers, are under surveillance."

After Luther had gone, Wayt sat for a long time staring out into Main Street. He had been accused of many things, but never of stage robbery. It was

comical, but it might have serious consequences. He knew that the sheriff's party, including the Northrups, the Tods, and the lawless element generally, would stop at nothing to chase him out of town, or frame him and try to send him to the Yuma Penitentiary. If it came to a showdown and there was nothing else left to do, he, as a Federal deputy marshal, could find some excuse and stage a killing that might solve his problem. But he didn't want to do that. What he wanted was to make Alkali a safe place to live in, to rid it of toughs and bullies. Also he wanted to be sheriff.

He sent out to the bar for whiskey, then he took off his coat, unbuttoned his vest, and sat down to think things over. It was nearly dark now and the streets were a cloudy blue. The flares had been lighted in front of the Palace Dance Hall and one by one the street-lamps came on as the lighter went his rounds. The evening wind had a touch of fall in it. Wayt sat looking out into the street and smoking.

Since his twenty-second birthday, a little less than ten years ago, he had served as a peace officer. Unlike most officials, he had not stumbled into the calling by accident. He had chosen it. Born with a rigid sense of order, the extravagance and lawlessness of

the frontier offended him; and, born with a somewhat exaggerated sense of his own worth and importance, the swaggering insolence of the badmen, the two-gun men, infuriated him. He made up his mind, after spending a year in Dodge City, eluding badmen and effacing himself to keep from being killed, to join the Law and Order party, acquire a badge, and declare war on the two-gun men. He started out as a deputy sheriff and at twenty-three made a name for himself in Dodge City by killing one notorious badman and wounding another in a gun battle. At twenty-six he was town marshal, leader of the Law and Order party, and known to be as dangerous as any of the lawless element. His reputation swelled to such proportions that the right wing of the Law and Order party considered him not much better than the men he had declared war on; merely a badman with a badge. But he cleaned up Dodge City and when he resigned to go prospecting with Luther and Brant White, who had come to Dodge City from Texas, a banquet was given in his honor and he was presented with a pearl-handled Colt with his record etched on the steel barrel.

The three of them went broke in Colorado, where they were joined by Jim, who had given up his job

in Dodge City. Brant took up his old trade of gambling, Luther went to work on a ranch, and Wayt was appointed town marshal and justice of the peace of Rockford, a little mining town where men were shot down on the streets every day. Brant shot a man in a poker game without giving him a chance to draw, and Wayt saved him from hanging only because he was fearless and stood his ground with a repeating rifle. Two days later the three of them left the town and at Trinidad they met Jim, who had been working out of Rockford as a freighter. Jim sold his team and wagon and stayed in Trinidad. The four of them lived there for nearly a year, Brant dealing faro, Wayt and Luther as peace officers, and Jim doing nothing mostly. Wayt made a lot of enemies as town marshal and at the next city election was defeated. Two nights after the election Wayt was shot at as he was leaving his house. A gun battle followed. Wayt wounded two miners and Brant was shot through the body. Luther saved them from the mob by the judicious use of a sawed-off shot gun, and they left town, pursued by a posse, whose members were not exactly anxious to catch up with them, and gave up the chase after Wayt had dropped one of their horses at long range.

After wandering for a few months, they rode into Prescott, Arizona, where their reputation had preceded them, and Wayt was appointed Federal deputy marshal by E. L. Benton, Federal marshal for Arizona, and ordered to go on to Alkali, which needed cleaning up. Wayt's first act was to run down and kill Miguel Soto, the outlaw who had been terrorizing the small ranchers and settlers of the San Jose Valley. This made his name known in all of San Miguel County. Luther Johnson was appointed town marshal to finish the unexpired term of John Fitzgerald, who had been shot from ambush by some cowboys he had previously arrested for disturbing the peace. Later, Wayt captured two Texas train robbers and shot and killed the Mescalero Kid, a half-breed wanted for murder. The rewards were large and Wayt bought a half interest in the Golden Girl and put Jim to work. The Johnson faction was more prosperous than it had been since the Dodge City days.

Wayt rolled another cigarette and drank the last of the whiskey, then he propped his feet up on the table and sat looking out into Main Street, which was crowded now and noisy.

A group of miners, arm in arm, were taking up all

the sidewalk in front of the Golden Girl, forcing everybody to go round them. Wayt saw that two of them were armed and that one of them had a gun in his hand. Just as he was getting to his feet, he heard a shot, then some shouting, and, going to the window and opening it, he saw Luther rush down the steps. Wayt leapt out the window. Luther struck the nearest miner over the head with the barrel of his gun and he fell to the sidewalk. Two of the miners ran across the street and into the Transcontinental, but Wayt grabbed the man who had fired the shot. A crowd surrounded them and Brant White came out of the Golden Girl with his hat on the side of his head, carrying a shot-gun.

"Some of that Elderville bunch, eh?" he said. "Wayt, let me turn this little toy loose on 'em and maybe it'll disperse 'em a whole lot."

"It went off by accident," said the miner who had fired the gun. "Wasn't aiming to harm nobody, Mr. Johnson."

The miners stood huddled in a scared group, glancing sideways at Brant, who had his shot-gun leveled.

"Lock 'em up, Luther," said Wayt. "Learn 'em a lesson. I reckon they think they're over in Elderville."

"I'm aiming to, Wayt," said Luther.

The crowd parted and Joe Elder, a man about sixty and the owner of two big silver mines, came over to Wayt.

"I'll be responsible for 'em, Wayt Johnson," he said. "They was just on their way home, wasn't you boys? They're my men and I'll be responsible for 'em."

"We're locking 'em up, Mr. Elder," said Wayt.

"You're turning 'em loose," said Elder, who was used to being obeyed. "They ain't harming nobody."

"They was packing guns," said Luther, "and we're aiming to lock 'em up."

"Don't argue," said Wayt, starting the prisoners toward the jail.

But Joe Elder walked along beside him, pulling at his sleeve. Luther put handcuffs on the man who had fired the shot. Brant left the doorway of the Golden Girl and walked a little to the rear of the group, carrying his shot gun hip high. The crowd followed, laughing and jeering.

"Fine 'em right here," said Joe Elder; "that's all you'll do anyway, you and your bought-up justice. Fine 'em right here and I'll pay the fines."

Wayt turned and stared at Joe Elder.

"Mr. Elder," he said, "I wouldn't advise you to come too near the jail with that there kind of talk."

Elder took a step backward, then went off through the crowd, muttering. Some one from the rear of the mob shouted: "Joe, they tell me the Johnsons are fixing to hold up another stage!" Brant whirled instantly and a man began to run, stumbling and at last falling flat on his face just beyond the edge of the crowd. It was one of Joe Tod's cowhands. Brant jerked him to his feet.

"Drunk, are you!" shouted Brant. "Disturbing the peace and resisting an officer, are you? You're going to spend a night in jail."

"It wasn't me," said the cowhand. "I was feared you'd think it was me count of the feller right side of me yelled."

Brant laughed and shoved him toward the jail by a side street.

"Anyway," said the cowhand, regaining his courage since Brant made no move to harm him, "you ain't no officer nohow."

"Ain't I?" said Brant, turning back his coat and showing a badge. "How come I ain't?"

Brant had been deputized in Wayt's absence and he had been looking for a chance to show his authority.

"You can't arrest a feller for running," said the cowhand. Then he pulled away from Brant, but Brant said:

"Listen, cowboy, did you ever see a man shot at close range with a shot-gun?"

"No," said the cowhand.

"Well," said Brant, "it tears him clean in half."

The cowhand walked silently to the jail where Luther and Wayt were already locking up the miners.

"Here's another one," said Brant.

"That all?" asked the jailer.

"Ain't that enough for one haul?" said Brant, laughing.

Luther, Brant and Wayt sat down on a bench in front of the jail, waiting for the crowd to disperse; but in a little while shots were heard in the direction of the Golden Girl and Luther, shouting, "Wait here!" shouldered his way through the crowd and ran up Main Street. While Brant and Wayt were talking, Smith Sanders and Deadwood joined them.

"Well," shouted somebody in the darkness at the

edge of the crowd, "the whole passel of killers has joined up now. Look out you don't get shot in the back, fellers."

Somebody shot off a revolver and there was a long laugh. Brant climbed up on the bench and raised his shot gun.

"One!" he said. "Two! Boys, I'm going to hold off that three a little longer and then the undertaker'll have a whole lot of customers."

The men in the front of the crowd began to draw away a step at a time but the ones in the rear pressed forward.

Brant said: "Three!" and fired one barrel into the ground. There was a panic. Men scattered in all directions, and in a few minutes the street in front of the jail was empty.

"Whoopee!" cried Brant, flourishing his shot gun; "as a deputy there ain't no flies on me."

"Deadwood," said Wayt, "go see what's happened to Luther."

Deadwood left them, hitching his gunbelt around so he could get hold of his gun in a hurry.

"This town's getting back to normal," said Wayt. "We're surely going to have our hands full for a spell."

"Good," said Brant. "It'll seem like old times, Wayt."

"Ed Deal's talking about selling out and going to Tucson," said Smith.

Brant burst out laughing, but Wayt said:

"Buy him out, Brant."

"Not me," said Brant. "I'm flat broke."

"How about you, Smith?"

"I'm considering it," said Smith.

"Good," said Brant. "It'll all be in the family now, anyway."

In a little while they saw Luther coming toward them with two men, who were arguing and protesting loudly. Deadwood brought up the rear with his gun in his hand.

"Going to have a full house," said the jailer. "You got to give me a helper, Wayt."

"Well," said Luther, "here's a couple of skunks that 'lowed they'd shoot up the Golden Girl. Ed Deal's in a faint and Doc Harley says he's got him a heart attack."

"Do tell," said Brant.

The two men were cowhands and they were drunk.

"Wayt Johnson," said one of them, "we're aiming to put you underground."

Brant gave him a shove, then the jailer opened the door, and Luther kicked them into a cell. They began to howl and swear.

"Deadwood," said Wayt, "you take a turn here and Brant'll be down about midnight."

"All right, boss," said Deadwood.

"Know what I'm aiming to do?" demanded Brant. "I'm aiming to let 'em loose and fill 'em full of lead as they come out."

"Tut!" said Wayt.

When they got to the Golden Girl a drunken mob was milling at the bar and all the poker games were crowded. Brant opened up his faro table and sat dealing with his gun at his elbow; Smith sat in the look-out's seat with his gun in his lap. Jim was behind the bar, supervising the bartenders and occasionally mixing a drink. Luther lounged at the side of the door and took a look at everybody that came in.

Wayt went upstairs to see Ed Deal. He was lying on his bed and he was very pale. Doc Harley was sitting beside him, smoking.

"They tell me you keeled over, Ed," said Wayt.

"Yes," said Ed, "I can't stand this town no longer. There's killing in the air, Wayt. My heart's bad and I can't stand it."

"He dropped like a log," said Doc. "I thought one of them cowhands had shot him."

"Ed," said Wayt, "Smith's figuring on buying you out, if you'll sell."

"Thank God," said Ed.

Wayt talked to Ed for a few minutes, trying to cheer him up, then Jim opened the door.

"Wayt," he said, "Henry Williams wants to see you."

"All right," said Wayt. Then turning back to Ed he said: "I'll send Smith up when he gets time."

Jim held the door open for Wayt, who went out.

"Jim," said Ed, "sit down and talk to me a spell, won't you?"

"Well," said Jim, "we're pretty busy downstairs, but I'll set a minute."

"Good," said Doc Harley, getting to his feet.

Wayt found Justice Williams waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs. He was a small man with sandy hair turning gray over his ears, and sharp blue

eyes. He was usually smiling, but now he looked grave.

"Howdy, Henry," said Wayt. "Step back here."

He led him to a back room and they sat down at a table.

"Have a drink?" asked Wayt.

"No," said Williams; then he sat fumbling with his glasses, shining them.

"Henry," said Wayt, "you're looking pretty glum of a sudden. What's the trouble?"

"Wayt," he said, "I got a very unpleasant duty to perform. I got an affidavit here I want you to see. If I wasn't dead set on throwing in with you Johnsons, I'd've had some arrests made already, but as it is!" He spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "Here," he went on, taking a paper out of his pocket, "take a look at this, Wayt, and then see what an uneasy seat I'm setting in."

Wayt glanced at the heading of the affidavit, then began to read it, from time to time glancing up at Williams, who sat impassive with his bright eyes fixed on Wayt's face. Wayt smiled, folded up the affidavit and handed it back to Williams.

"Lies," said Wayt. "I know Remedios Orante better than I know my hat. Jimmy used to spend right

smart of time with that gal, but now he don't go near, you understand? It's all in revenge."

"I see," said Williams. "But, Wayt, I got to take official cognizance of this. Yes sir. My hand is forced. Only I'm holding up this affidavit. Nobody's seen it but me. Charley Lung witnessed it but he can't read." He sat tapping on the table for a little while, then he went on: "No sir. I reckon this affidavit can wait, and happen this young Mexican girl'd come to see the error of her ways and swear t'other way round, why, this affidavit could be consigned to the flames without a word of it getting out."

Wayt smiled and said:

"You know Jim didn't have nothing to do with that hold up, Henry." Williams said nothing and Wayt inquired: "Would you mind keeping your office open a spell tonight?"

"Not at all," said Williams. "As a matter of fact, I've got a sight of work to ketch up on."

"Good," said Wayt. "I'll drop around to see you later. I know this here Remedios'll tell you a mighty different story when she's sober."

"Come to think of it," said Williams, "she did seem a little under the weather when I seen her. Yes sir. I been thinking about that."

Wayt went out and Williams went into the bar to play a little faro before going back to his office.

Wayt left Main Street at Bonanza and cut across to Santa Ana. It was dark here and Wayt took the middle of the street, walking fast. Most of the adobes crowding the street were without lights, but occasionally a yellow beam was thrown across his path from an open door. In the district near the station, women were sitting in front of the adobes and when he passed they called: "Señor, oiga a mi!" Then they enumerated their good points rapidly and named a price.

The Orante shack was dark, but Wayt saw someone sitting on a low bench by the door. He lit a match. An old woman with a lean, wrinkled face and dirty gray hair, got to her feet, startled, and tried to peer beyond the match.

"Is Remedios here?" asked Wayt.

The old woman caught the name and said: "No, señor." Then, reassured, she sat down on the bench again and Wayt heard her sobbing. He asked her what was the matter and she answered with a flood of unintelligible Spanish, but Wayt caught the word "muerto." He took the old woman by the shoulder.

"Remedios dead?" he demanded. "Remedios muerto?"

"No, señor," said the old woman.

"I want her," said Wayt. "Where has she gone?"

"Ah," said the old woman, sobbing, not trying to understand him, "muerto, muerto!"

Wayt shook her.

"Remedios muerto?" he insisted.

"No, no!" cried the old woman, "perfido, señor! Remedios perfido." She sat thinking, then, with an effort, she said: "Me, abuela. Rafael muerto. Remedios perfido. Gone."

"Gone?" said Wayt, shaking the old woman gently. "Es asi, o no?"

"Es verdad," said the old woman. "Remedios perfido. Diga Usted? Gone."

Wayt struggled with his Spanish vainly. He lit another match and said:

"Gone?" Then by the light of the match he indicated the four directions with his hand. "Where?"

"A donde?" said the old woman, then after a long pause: "Yuma May."

"Good," said Wayt, blowing out the match and getting to his feet.

But the old woman got up also and took his hand.

"Señor," she said, "Rafael. . . . !" She pulled him toward the door. "Rafael muerto. Entre Usted señor."

She opened the door and Wayt followed her into the shack. At the far end, Rafael, with his hands crossed on his chest, was stretched out on a bench and two feeble candles were burning at his head. The old woman fell on her knees beside the bench and began to sob. Wayt took off his hat and stood looking down at Rafael, whose swarthy face was so pale now, rigid in death. He put his hand on the old woman's shoulder.

"Lo siento," he said, then he took out his fold and gave her a ten dollar bill. She turned and kissed his hand. Wayt pulled away as if she had bitten him.

He left the Settlement and walked south on Santa Ana till he came to Bonanza, then he turned west. There were lights here and music. Oil flares burned in front of a Mexican dance hall, and a dozen Mexicans were leaning against the hitching-rack in front of it. Some of them took off their hats when Wayt passed. One of them bowed and said:

"Good evening, Señor Johnson. Will you honor us by coming in?"

"Good evening," said Wayt. "Sorry. I'm in a hurry."

He climbed the long flight of steps up to Yuma May's house, which was built on a little rise of ground and overlooked the street. Yuma May herself answered the door. She was a big woman with a pile of dyed red hair. She had on a purple silk dress. Her breasts, big as toy balloons, were forced upward by her corset which was laced so tight that she could hardly walk and couldn't bend. She looked surprised, seeing Wayt, but she smiled immediately.

"Well, Mr. Johnson," she said.

"May," said Wayt, "I want Remedios Orante."

"Great. Excellent," said Yuma May. "She ain't busy. A wonderful girl, Mr. Johnson."

"I want to see her on business."

"On business?" said May. "I thought . . ."

"Never mind what you thought," said Wayt.

May stared at him angrily, then she went after Remedios. Wayt sat down on a red plush sofa and dangled his hat. Upstairs there was some loud talking, a scream, then a man came in from a back room and took the stairs at three jumps. The noise of the quarrel subsided. Then the man descended slowly, his face red from the exertion. Seeing Wayt, he said:

"Some of them fellers don't think they're getting their money's worth 'less they bust up things a whole lot." He turned and shouted up the stairs: "Come on. I'm waiting for you."

A little man came slowly down the stairs with his coat over his arm and his shoes unlaced.

"Git out of here," said the bouncer, "and stay out till you mend your ways. This is a house for gentlemen and not the likes of you."

The little man glanced at Wayt, then looked away hastily and went out. The bouncer came over and stood in front of Wayt.

"What you got that gun on for?" he demanded. "Guns ain't allowed."

Wayt looked up at him.

"You're a new feller around here, ain't you?"

"I am," said the bouncer. "I been here about a week. But what's that got to do with that iron you're toting?"

"I'm Wayt Johnson."

"Oh," said the bouncer, recoiling a step, "excuse me, Mr. Johnson. I heard of you, of course. Everybody's heard of you, I reckon. But I ain't never seen you, so it ain't my fault."

Wayt said nothing, but looked at his boots. He

enjoyed being known. It pleased him to have a man change his tune so abruptly.

The bouncer shifted his feet, then left the room.

Yuma May came in, swinging her hips indignantly, followed by Remedios, who was pale and came toward Wayt reluctantly.

"I want her, May," said Wayt.

"No," said Remedios, turning quickly to May, "don't let him take me. I will never come back."

"I say he won't take you," said May. "Wayt Johnson, she's one of the best girls I got."

"She's leaving town," said Wayt.

"No," said Remedios. "Don't let him take me, please, May. They will kill me."

"He won't take you," said May.

Wayt stood looking at them and even May began to feel uneasy.

"They made me!" cried Remedios, going a little closer to Wayt. "They stood outside and made me."

"May," said Wayt, "do you want her killed?"

"Good God," said May; "you wouldn't kill a woman!"

"He will! He will!" cried Remedios.

May looked at Wayt for a long time, then she said:

"I want two hundred dollars for her or I'll see the sheriff."

"Not a cent," said Wayt. "I might be persuaded, being's you're earning your living this way, but you can't threaten me with the sheriff nohow."

"I didn't mean that, Mr. Johnson," said May. "I know what that fat-headed sheriff amounts to." She snapped her fingers. "That!"

Wayt took out his fold and counted out a hundred dollars.

"No! No!" cried Remedios, trying to hold Yuma May back; "they will kill me."

"Tut!" said Wayt. "Nobody's going to harm you none 'less you get balky." Holding the money out to May he said: "One hundred dollars, May, and you got to give her some decent clothes to go away in."

May stood tapping her foot, looking at Wayt; but presently she made up her mind not to protest as it was a good thing to keep friendly with Wayt Johnson.

"Give me that money," said May, "I'll fix her up."

Remedios looked from one to the other, her face pale and drawn, then she made a sudden dash for the door, but Wayt caught her and held her.

"I'm giving you money to go to Tucson," he said. "Settle yourself or I'll have to give you a night in jail."

"Madre! Madre!" cried Remedios, and fainted.

"God damn," said May; "if that ain't a Mexican for you."

"Get her some quiet clothes," said Wayt, carrying Remedios to the sofa.

VI

When the Southern Pacific pulled into the Alkali station, there were only four people on the platform: Will Price, the agent, Remedios, Wayt Johnson, and Henry Williams. While Price and Williams saw that Remedios got aboard, Wayt had a talk with the conductor, who was a friend of his.

When the train had gone, Will Price put his arm around Wayt and said:

"At it night and day, ain't you? Man, don't you never rest?"

"Don't exaggerate and lay it on like that," said Wayt. "There ain't a lazier man in these parts."

Williams and Wayt said good night to Price and walked up Main Street in silence. At the corner of Bonanza and Main, they stopped. Williams lived just around the corner.

"Wayt," said Williams, "no use dodging the issue. You got a lot of enemies."

"Never had less," said Wayt. "A peace officer that

goes about his business makes enemies and that's the end of it."

"We'll never be satisfied till we see you sheriff," said Williams. "Only, Wayt; chain Jimmy down and make him behave."

"He's a mighty careless boy," said Wayt. "But he means all right. I was pretty wild myself at his age, only I took mine out on the side of the law, which was none too respectable in them days."

"Nor now," said Williams, "in some offices. Well, good night, Wayt. We're square on that affidavit business now. One for and one against cancels. But that surely was a mighty scared Mexican!"

"She thought we was aiming to kill her," said Wayt. "Good night."

When Wayt came in the Golden Girl, Jim said:

"Where you been, Wayt, Brant and all of us have been wondering?"

"Just out looking for trouble," said Wayt, smiling.

PART IV

I

WINGETT pushed back his hat, lit a cigar and sat sipping his beer, waiting for the bartender to leave the room. Wayt was standing with his back against the wall, striking at his boots with his quirt. When the bartender closed the door, Wingett said:

"I reckon you heard the news, Wayt."

Wayt kept striking at his boots but said nothing.

"Well, did you?" Wingett demanded.

"Don't know as I did," said Wayt, without looking up.

"Well," said Wingett, "Ramon Orante and Mike Foster were killed over near Pecos. A couple of cowhands laid for 'em and let 'em have it. 'Pears like they was a sight too apparent in that community."

"That sort of settles things up," said Wayt.

Wingett took a long pull at his beer, wiped his mouth with a big white handkerchief, and put his head on one side.

"Wayt," he said, "I just left the mayor and he was asking me about you. 'Pears like he ain't satisfied

that justice has been done concerning the killing of Jud Burt and old man Thompson."

Wayt said nothing.

" 'Pears like he's got a lot of mighty queer information on the subject. Fin Elder's pretty active at the present time."

Wayt began to roll a cigarette. Wingett hesitated, then said:

"Speak up, Wayt."

"I ain't got a word to say," said Wayt. "The Mexican and Foster 're dead over Pecos Way. I seen Joel King die myself. The fourth party is unknown. Now what's all the fuss?"

"Well," said Wingett, "Fin Elder 'lows he knows the fourth and he's a mighty near relative of yourself. Anyhow, the *Herald's* kicking up a sight of trouble."

"They got to sell their papers," said Wayt, "and there ain't nothing happened of note since the stage killing. Mr. Wingett, I aim to do my duty. But no Fin Elder and no dirty newspapers're going to stampede me none."

"Wayt," said Wingett, "the decent folks of this community's aiming to give you all the backing you

want. You've done your work like an honest man, you and Luther, but there's a heap of rumors floating about right now and some of the faithful is getting worried."

Wayt said nothing. Wingett finished his beer, then he uncrossed his legs, crossed them again, took his hat off and put it on; finally he said:

"Wayt, I'm asking you fairly. Did young Jim have anything to do with that hold up job?"

"Not a thing," said Wayt, "and for proof I'll refer you to Henry Williams. The whole thing is a passel of lies put up by that bunch of cattle thieves south a piece who are scairt to hell I'm going to clean up this town."

"Fin Elder's backed by a good many people, Wayt," said Wingett, "and he 'lows he's going to do some arresting 'fore long."

"Let him," said Wayt. "But it won't be Jimmy. Tell the mayor it's a heap of lies."

Wingett got up.

"Wayt," he said, "I'm going along with you and I'm not the only one neither, but you got a heap of enemies. Joe Elder, for one and he ain't to be laughed at; all the Tods and Northrups, and Fin Elder him-

self. I can't see no way out of it, Wayt. There's going to be a sight of trouble in Alkali 'fore we're done."

"I ain't complaining," said Wayt.

II

It was hot. Though it was toward the middle of October and the wind had been chilly more than one night, the sun was beating down with summer intensity and heat waves were dancing in the streets. Men were lounging wherever they could find shade. The town was quiet.

Wayt had been to the blacksmith's shop superintending the shoeing of his gelding and talking with Justin. When he left the shop he heard the thunder of horsemen and, turning, he saw two men galloping into the town, their horses lathered. One was a peace officer from the Elderville district: Harv Jones. He was hatless and his face was red from the heat and sun. The man with him was a stranger to Wayt.

"Hey!" shouted Wayt, as the men galloped past.

Harv turned in his saddle, saw Wayt, reined in, and shouted to the man with him, who was heading for the middle of town. The man reined in and they rode back to where Wayt was standing.

"Wayt," said Harv, jumping off his horse, "being's you're the U. S. marshal, I'm turning this varmint over to you. He killed Hen Burley over in Elderville and the Tod bunch is aiming to hang him."

Wayt looked up at the man, who was small and dark, and sat with lowered eyes, his face twitching.

"What's your name, mister?" demanded Wayt.

The man stammered, but Harv said:

"Johnny Kinsman and he's a bad one, shooting a man in the back. But," he went on, "Joe Tod and them Elderville miners got almighty frisky and dictatorial, so I says to 'em, you'll not hang him, by God, not as long as I'm wearing this badge."

"And they won't," said Wayt.

"Don't let 'em git me, Mr. Johnson," said Johnny, leaning toward Wayt. "I'm willing to stand my trial and take my medicine, but I ain't got the stomach for hanging."

"For informal hanging," said Harv, " 'cause you'll swing 'cording to law sure as I'm standing here."

"Maybe," said Johnny, "but it'll be legal and decent."

"Some folks has queer taste," said Harv, "but it ain't none of my business. I done my duty and I'm shut of you."

"Where at's this Elderville mob?" enquired Wayt.

"They're coming," said Harv. "Before you're much older you'll see 'em at the edge of town and they're a pretty riled lot."

"Let's be moving," said Johnny.

"Harv," said Wayt, "I'll take your prisoner and relieve you of all responsibility, but you ride down to the Golden Girl and tell Brant White and Luther to meet me at Slack's storeroom. I ain't trusting this gent to no jail."

"Good," said Harv, climbing on his horse. He turned his horse's head toward the Golden Girl but hesitated. "Wayt," he said, "listen to what I'm telling you. That mob is bad and they mean business. Don't get yourself shot up over this varmint. Joe Tod's drunk and packing two guns."

"Never you mind," said Wayt.

Harv rode off down the street.

"Mister," said Wayt to Johnny, "get off that horse and follow me."

"Where we going?" demanded Johnny, jumping to the ground.

Wayt didn't answer but started off down Main Street, taking such long strides that Johnny, who had

short, bowed legs, was forced to run. He caught up with Wayt and took him by the arm.

"Mr. Johnson," he said, "you're going to stand by me, ain't you? And see that I get square dealing?"

"Yes," said Wayt. "Now keep your mouth shut and do like I tell you."

When they passed Dixon's gun store, Mr. Dixon came and stood in the door.

"Mr. Dixon," said Wayt, "a mob's coming from Elderville to hang this here feller and I'm going to put him in Slack's storeroom, so I'd advise you to shut up shop and keep indoors."

"Thank you, Wayt," said Mr. Dixon.

Two doors further along, Wayt turned into an unoccupied one-storey frame building. It used to be a cobbler's shop and there were still small piles of leather scraps on the floor. It was wedged in between two taller buildings and could be entered only by the front or the back door. Wayt shoved Johnny in ahead of him.

"Mister," said Wayt, "if it comes to shooting, which most likely it won't, lay down on the floor. That's all I'm asking you to do. Otherwise just set tight."

Johnny put his back up against the wall and stood

staring at Wayt. He looked sick and his hands were shaking.

"You'll never stop 'em, Mr. Johnson," he said, his face contorted, "there's too many of 'em and they ain't taking no for an answer."

"You keep your mouth shut," said Wayt.

Johnny stood leaning against the wall for a little while, then he sat down on the floor. Mr. Dixon came out of his store and locked it. He was carrying a double-barreled shot-gun.

"Wayt," he said, "I'm going on home. Take this gun. There ain't nothing on earth a mob hates worse than a shot-gun. She's all loaded."

"Thank you, Mr. Dixon," said Wayt, taking the gun.

Mr. Dixon went on down the street, and Wayt leaned the gun against the front of the house and sat down on the doorstep. Groups had begun to form on the street corners and from time to time a man rode past the storeroom and tried to peer in.

"Get down on the floor, mister," said Wayt.

Johnny took off his coat and, using it for a pillow, lay down.

Wayt saw Luther and Brant coming down the street on the run. Brant was carrying a shot-gun by

a strap and Luther had a repeating rifle. They were followed by a crowd from the Transcontinental.

"Where you fellers going?" shouted some one.

"Duck hunting," Brant shouted back.

Wayt got to his feet to meet them.

"Wayt," said Luther, "that damn fool Harv Jones is so all-fired excited and locoed he's telling everybody in town."

"I forgot to muzzle him," said Wayt.

Luther paid no attention to the prisoner but squatted in front of the storeroom, holding his rifle. Brant went in and prodded Johnny with the butt of his gun.

"Young feller," said Brant, "don't you know it's agin the law to go shooting up people in a refined town like Elderville?"

"It's a pity it wasn't a Tod that caught the lead," said Luther.

Johnny got some of his courage back at the sight of reinforcements.

"Fellers," he said, "that Burley man pestered me till I had to shoot him. A foul-mouthed feller if I ever seen one. Damning and cussing everybody and not carrying a gun. Yes sir. You'd say to him, get out your iron, mister, or close your mouth. But he'd

say, I don't pack no guns and I'm law abiding."

"I've seen the breed," said Brant.

A bunch of cowhands rode by, whooping.

"Hurray for the Johnsons," one of them jeered, "a-doing battle for the right!"

At the corner of Bonanza and Main a crowd was forming, and in a little while the men from Elderville began to arrive, on horseback, in wagons, any way they could get in. Miners predominated, as Hen Burley was the superintendent of the Culebra de Cascadel Mine, but there were a good many cowhands and hangers-on, who joined the mob for the excitement. Frame Tod was walking about in the crowd, his silver-studded chaps glittering in the sun, and Joe Tod was sitting on his horse, talking to Ed Howe, a mine foreman, who was carrying a rifle.

"Look," said Brant, pointing Frame Tod out, "if he ain't a proper cowboy! I'd give a heap of money to dust him on both sides."

"You may get a chance," said Luther.

"There probably won't be no shooting," said Wayt. "Them fellers 'll take water mighty fast when I get out there with this here gun Mr. Dixon give me."

" 'Pears to me you're mighty saving of lead," said Brant. "I got to start shooting at bottles or my gun's going to get rusty. This town's getting too refined for me. If Joe Tod hadn't hit Luis's gun, I'd never got a chance to puncture that Texas badman nohow. It's a sin."

"Here they come," said Luther, getting to his feet.

The mob had formed and was coming down the middle of the street, led by Joe Tod and Ed Howe. Windows began to open, heads were thrust out; and the roofs of the buildings opposite the storeroom were crowded. Wayt got up and said:

"Luther, take the back door and don't shoot till they force your hand. But if they do, don't be playful with 'em but put some lead where it'll do the most good."

Luther walked through the storeroom and out the back. Johnny sat up.

"Are they sure enough coming?" he demanded, his teeth chattering.

"They are," said Brant, "so keep your head down."

"Brant," said Wayt, "you stay in the doorway and don't get fractious with that shot-gun. If I have to shoot, shoot with me."

"Yes sir," said Brant, "and I'll get me a Tod."

Suddenly Johnny began to shake all over, then he started to sob.

"Shut your mouth," said Brant, prodding him with his boot. "What ails you, anyway? Ain't we handling guns to keep your dirty neck out of a rope? Hell!"

Johnny put his coat over his face and lay down.

Wayt picked up the shot-gun and walked toward the crowd.

"Fellers," he shouted, "you got ten paces leeway. I'm aiming to see this Johnny person tried fair and square and I ain't looking for interference. Come farther than them ten paces and there'll be a heap of burying."

The crowd kept on coming, but slower now. Ed Howe brandished his rifle.

"Wayt Johnson," he shouted, "we're aiming to hang that skunk high and dry and you ain't stopping us none."

There were shouts and jeers from the crowd, and Frame Tod waved his white hat.

"Wayt," called Joe Tod, "I seen Brant White kill one varmint without a peep out of you. What you holding this Johnny person back on us for?"

"Whoa!" shouted Wayt, bringing his shot-gun to

his shoulder, "you've et up them ten paces and two more besides. Keep your places, gents, or I'm killing a few of you."

"Let 'em have it, Wayt," shouted Brant, raising his gun.

The crowd stopped and some of those in front began to back up, treading on the toes of those behind them. At the rear of the crowd there were shouts and curses. "Keep moving! What's holding you! Feared of two men, you skunks!" Frame Tod waved his hat to no purpose, holding back himself, and Joe Tod turned and talked heatedly to Ed Howe, who handed Joe his rifle and took three steps toward Wayt.

"That's far enough, Ed," said Wayt.

Ed stopped and said:

"Wayt, you always struck me as a reasonable man. Where's the sense in you getting yourself shot up over a stinking coward that shoots men in the back."

"No use palavering," said Wayt. "Step back into the ranks, Ed, and tell them fellers to disperse pronto or I'm scattering some lead."

"We're taking that skunk, Wayt," said Ed.

Wayt said nothing but swung his gun up and down the front ranks of the crowd. Ed stepped back and took his rifle from Joe Tod.

"Come on, boys," shouted Ed, "let's go after him."

But nobody moved.

Brant burst out laughing and, leaning his gun against the wall, sat down.

"I reckon Wayt can handle you one and all," he shouted; "I'm going to take me a siesta."

Joe Tod gave a few orders and four men left the crowd, turned into Bonanza Street and came round behind the storeroom. But they found Luther facing them with his rifle raised.

"Git!" he said, and they turned and ran. They knew that Luther was less patient than Wayt.

When they joined the crowd in front of the store Joe Tod took off his hat and jumped on it, then he turned and angrily shouldered his way through the crowd.

"I'm done with this passel of cowards," he said.

Brant laughed.

" 'Pears like Joe's mighty indignant 'cause you fellers won't get yourselves shot up for him."

Ed Howe waved his arms and shouted:

"Come on, boys. Let's take him."

Johnny heard the shout, flung the coat off his head, and, jumping to his feet, made a dash for the back door, but Luther struck at him with the butt of his rifle and drove him back in.

"There he is!" shouted somebody, and the crowd began to move slowly forward.

Brant jumped to his feet and picked up his gun.

"Kill that blasted Johnson!" yelled a man on the edge of the crowd.

"All right," said Wayt, "kill me. Come ahead."

He planted his feet firmly and swung the muzzle of the gun up and down the front ranks, which hesitated and began to hold back; the ones in the rear were pushing and cursing.

"Get him! Get him!" shouted somebody.

Wayt turned and winked at Brant.

"All ready, Brant?"

Brant nodded.

"When I count three," shouted Wayt, "let 'em have it."

Brant raised his gun.

"One!" said Wayt.

There was a convulsive movement in the crowd

and shouts of: "Quit your pushing!" Some of the men in the front ranks turned and tried to shoulder their way into the middle. Ed Howe stood his ground.

"Two!" said Wayt.

Men at the edge of the crowd began to disappear between the buildings, into the stores, around the corner. Two fist fights started and the crowd began to mill like a herd of cattle in a storm. Then somebody accidentally discharged a gun and there was a panic. Men fell full length trying to get away, there was a tangle of arms and legs, and in a moment men were running in all directions, hurdling hitching racks, flinging rifles away in their haste, crouching behind telegraph poles, climbing into open windows. Ed Howe and Frame Tod remained.

Ed flung his rifle on the ground in disgust.

"You win, Wayt," he said. "I surely am ashamed of this here Elderville bunch. As fine a passel of cowards as I ever seen."

"Wayt Johnson," said Frame Tod, "you got your guts along with you and I ain't afraid to say so."

"Frame," said Brant, "you surely did live up to them pants."

Johnny, now that the danger had passed, came to the doorway and thumbed his nose at Ed Howe, but Brant turned and knocked him down with a blow of his fist.

III

WAYT sat in the back room behind the bar reading a letter. It was from Ed Deal, who was tending bar in Tucson. It read:

FRIEND WAYT:

I have bin in Tucson five days and like it very much. It is not sech a wild and woolly town as Alkali and locoed hombres are not always shooting up the place. I am very contented here and have a good job. Give Smith my best and I hope he gets along all right with running the bar and sech. If it hadn't of bin for my bad hart I would of staid in Alkali as I am not afraid of nobody. Friend Wayt, I do not think you know how many enemies you have got and sence I am in Tucson now I will tell you what I know. Fin Elder hates you like pizen and he told me that you and Jimmy arranged that hold up. I says to him, Fin Elder you are a liar. And he says, it's the God's truth, Ed. And I says, there ain't a straighter man in Alkali than Wayt Johnson. But Fin couldn't see it that way. I stuck up for you, Wayt. And now I will cloze.

Respectfully yours,
EDW. C. DEAL

Then Wayt picked up a little cardboard box he had got in the same mail. It had been carefully wrapped and filled with sand; in the sand Wayt found a .45 cartridge and a slip of paper with a message in pencil on it.

A little present for Mister Wayt (Sky-Pilot) Johnson. The brother to this here little memento will be delivered later.

Wayt sat for a long time looking out into the street, then he put the letter in his pocket and went out into the bar. Luther was sitting at a table in the back playing poker and Brant's faro table was crowded. Wayt went over to Luther.

"Things quiet?"

"I reckon so," said Luther.

"Where's Jim?"

Luther jerked his thumb over his shoulder and, turning, Wayt saw Jim sitting with Deadwood, who had just got back from War Bonnet. Wayt went over to them.

"Well," he said to Deadwood, "did you turn that Johnny person over to Ned Walker?"

"I did," said Deadwood, smiling, "and he was right glad to get him. He's wanted over there under

the name of Joe something. 'Pears like he shot up a poker game careless-like and hit somebody."

"Run into any trouble?"

"Well," said Deadwood, "nothing to speak of. A couple of mighty suspicious-looking Mexicans trailed me for a mile or two toward morning. I motioned for 'em to come on up and when they didn't, I let 'em have it long range and knocked over a horse."

"Recognize 'em?"

"No; can't say as I did," said Deadwood. "I got a little worried when we was riding through Wagon Pass, as this here Johnny was mighty scared of Injuns and kept begging me for a gun, case we met up with some. I was scared he'd bolt and I'd have to let him have it."

Wayt turned to Jim and said:

"Jim, I'm going out for a spell. If I ain't back in an hour send Luther down to the White Front."

"I'll come myself, Wayt," said Jim.

Wayt thought for a moment, then said:

"Get your gun and come along right now."

Jim went behind the bar and got a gun.

"Tell Luther," said Wayt to Deadwood, who nodded.

Wayt and Jim left the Golden Girl and walked south on Main. The streets were crowded and noisy. Since the mob had failed to take Johnny Kinsman from Wayt, the town had grown steadily more lawless. There had been brawls of all kinds, two shooting scrapes, and much wild drunkenness. Every night a part of the Elderville bunch rode over, deposited their guns ostentatiously at the Transcontinental, then proceeded to get drunk and raise hell. The dance halls were jammed; it was hard to get a seat at the Great Western after ten o'clock, and the saloons and gambling-halls never closed. The town was ready for trouble.

Wayt turned to Jim.

"Pull your coat over that gun, Jimmy, so there won't be no talk."

"All right, Wayt," said Jim; then, taking hold of Wayt's arm, he went on: "Luis Montoya's been bothering me, Wayt. Says I got to help him do something. Says he knows too much and that he's aiming to tell something 'less I help him."

"Never you mind," said Wayt.

They crossed the sidewalk in front of the White Front and went in. The bar was crowded and a half dozen miners from Elderville were standing swing-

ing their glasses and singing loudly. A cowhand with his back to Wayt had a gun in his holster. Wayt tapped him on the shoulder.

"Shove that gun over the bar," said Wayt.

Without a word the cowhand unstrapped his belt and handed it to a bartender. The singing stopped suddenly. Men in the back of the place stood up to see what was wrong. Joe Carmeno, who owned the White Front, came toward Wayt smiling. "To hell with the Johnsons!" shouted somebody at the far end of the bar and there was a chorus of jeers.

"Howdy," said Joe Carmeno; "looking for someone?"

"Yes," said Wayt. "Fin Elder here?"

Carmeno turned and they followed. At the far end of the bar a big, red-faced man made a sudden derisive noise with his mouth. Wayt stopped, went over to the man, and stood looking at him.

"Got any iron on you?" he demanded.

The big miner's whiskey courage left him under Wayt's stare and he lowered his eyes and shifted his feet. Wayt threw open his coat and found a gun in his hip pocket, which he tossed to a bartender.

"Drop down and see Justice Williams tomorrow," said Wayt.

"I'm on the day shift, Mr. Johnson," said the miner.

Wayt hesitated.

"All right," he said. "Next time I'll lock you up over night."

When Wayt went on, the big man's friends got round him in a circle and pointed their fingers at him, jeering.

"Well," said the miner, "why don't some of you brave hombres tackle him?"

Fin Elder was sitting in the rear of the saloon watching a poker game. When he saw Wayt and Jim coming he got to his feet and pulled nervously at his gun belt. The men round the poker table laid down their hands and stared. One of them was Joe Elder's son. He got to his feet. Before either Wayt or Fin could say anything, young Elder said:

"Mr. Johnson, I want to tell you right here and now that the folks over in Elderville are mighty resentful you didn't let 'em take that killing varmint and hang him high. We don't like no so-called peace officers interfering with our ideas of right, none whatever, and I hereby warn you that you better stay out of Elderville if you want to keep the peace."

Wayt stared at him but said nothing. Young Elder sat down, very uncomfortable, and the other players looked at one another, smiling.

"Well," said Fin, "you want to see me, Wayt?"

"Yes," said Wayt, taking Ed Deal's letter from his pocket and handing it to the sheriff.

Jim sat down at an unoccupied table and called for a drink. Wayt leaned against the back of a chair while Fin read the letter. Fin puffed himself up and got very red in the face.

"Lies, Wayt," he said; "all lies."

Wayt took the letter, folded it, and put it in his vest pocket.

"Fin," he said, "I want to make a little declaration right here in front of you, being's you're sheriff. I'm a law-abiding man and I'm doing my best to clean up this here town and getting no help from the sheriff's office. I've held my lead when many a feller would've been filling the burying ground. Now, I'm done. I ain't accusing you in particular, Fin. I ain't accusing nobody. But if I hear any more talk such as you read in Ed Deal's letter, I'm going to pin my badge on the front of the Golden Girl and step right out as a private citizen. If you know anybody that's likely to talk in that tone, Fin, just tell 'em such talk

ain't healthy nohow and you'll save their relatives a lot of trouble."

"Now, now," said Fin. "Don't get all riled, Wayt. You got enemies, sure enough, but who ain't? That little matter you're talking about is closed. The mayor told me today he'd decided to drop it and forget it, so you ain't got a kick on earth noway."

Wayt turned and motioned for Jim to follow him. When they had gone Fin sat down beside young Elder and said to him:

"Wayt's going to make a fool of himself one of these days and then we got him. Yes sir. He's going to get fighting mad and buck the law, and then this here community is going to get shut of a mighty pestering young feller."

When they were crossing the sidewalk in front of the White Front, Wayt put his arm around Jim.

"Jimmy," he said, "we're mighty near a showdown. I've always tried to keep you out of these here brawls but now you're near a man and you got to help me. Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. I'm counting on you."

Jim felt something dragging at his stomach. He said nothing. He was afraid. This wasn't like Wayt.

You could always depend on him to hold things in check, to be strong enough to dominate any situation that came up. He'd have to talk to Luther.

"You hear me?" Wayt demanded.

"I'll help you," said Jim.

"Good," said Wayt. "They're pushing me too far, son. They're presuming on my good nature. I'm telling you, I don't love my enemies as a Christian man ought. No sir. And I'm as willing to kill a Tod or a Northrup as Brant is. Only I been holding off. Yes sir. But now I'm powerful sick of this here swaggering bunch a-running roughshod over everybody and 'lowing what they'll stand and what they won't. I'm mighty sick of playing the game like a tin horn politician, such as Fin Elder, and I ain't so sure I can eat any more crow just to get into that sheriff's office."

They were walking past Mattie's Eating-House now and near the corner a big miner collided heavily with Wayt. Jim had seen the man coming and he had thought he had a peculiar look on his face; now he knew. The man had done it on purpose.

"Jumping snakes!" said the miner, "I reckon you Johnsons figure you own the sidewalks."

Wayt said nothing but, setting himself, knocked

the miner up against the hitching rack with his fist.

"Now," he said, "if you got a gun on you, get it out and go to work."

"Wayt!" cried Jim.

He saw a gun butt sticking out of the top of the miner's trousers. But the miner made no attempt to get at it. He stood holding his jaw and staring with his mouth open at Wayt, who was crouched like an animal, his hat off, and his hair standing straight up.

"I ain't looking for no fight, Mr. Johnson," said the miner.

"Get that gun, Jimmy," said Wayt.

Jim walked over to the miner, who, with his eyes fixed on Wayt, slowly raised his hands. A crowd had formed and men were running from all directions to see what was the matter. Jim gave Wayt the gun and Wayt unloaded it, put the cartridges in his pocket, and handed it back to the miner. Then he got up on the steps of Mattie's Eating-House and said:

"Gents, I'm giving that feller back his gun. To-night I ain't making no arrests. I'm plumb fed up with making arrests. But if there's a feller in the crowd that don't like my way of doing things let him speak up and I'll give him a bellyful."

Wayt was pale and his eyes glowed. There was a

long silence. Men turned to stare at each other. What in hell was the matter with Wayt Johnson?

"Come on, Wayt," said Jim, pulling at him, "let's go."

Wayt got down from the steps, picked up his hat, and the crowd parted. He saw Frame Tod on the edge of the crowd and walked over to him.

"Frame," he said, "got a gun on you?"

"Nope," said Frame.

Wayt pushed past him, shouldering him out of the way, and started across the street for the Golden Girl.

"Wayt," said Jim, "what's wrong with you?"

"I'm plumb fed up," said Wayt.

They crossed the sidewalk in silence and Wayt went up to his room without speaking. Jim went back to consult Luther and Deadwood.

About two o'clock in the morning, Luther went out to make his rounds. As he turned the corner at the end of the Golden Girl, he thought he heard a scraping sound as if someone in hiding had shifted a foot. He drew back quickly and immediately there was the roar and blinding flash of a shot-gun. Stunned by the report, Luther was unable to move,

but he heard two men running back between the buildings and, recovering himself, he ran after them, but lost them in the darkness of Santa Ana Street. When he came back, Wayt and Deadwood were standing on the sidewalk with Brant and Jim, and they were surrounded by a crowd from the bar.

"Shooting at you, Luther?" asked Wayt.

"Yes," said Luther, "mighty near nicked me, too."

He was wearing a loose coat and it had been unbuttoned and hanging. Holes the size of two fists had been shot through both sides of it.

Wayt said nothing but turned and went back up to his room. Luther stood looking after him.

"Brant," he said, "it's here sure enough. Just what you been aching for is here."

"Wayt ain't himself, that's a fact," said Deadwood.

"Ain't himself!" jeered Brant. "You don't know Wayt Johnson like I do."

When they had all gone in, Jim went up to Wayt's room, but the door was locked and Wayt paid no attention when he knocked.

IV

It was about ten in the morning. Wayt had called a meeting of the Johnson faction and he was sitting with Jim and Deadwood in a back room, waiting for the others. Jim's eyes were puffy with sleep and he sat nodding and weaving in his chair. Wayt was sitting with his feet on the table, smoking; and Deadwood was slowly rolling a cigarette and staring at the bright patches of sunlight on the floor. The bar was empty; the town quiet.

Smith Sanders came in, followed by Luther, and they sat down without speaking.

"Where's Brant?" asked Wayt.

"Bob's been calling him since nine o'clock," said Smith. "He surely is powerful hard to get up."

"Never goes to bed," said Luther. "It's a wonder he ain't got owl eyes in his head."

Luther pulled off his hat and took a half dozen cigars out of it, then he laughed.

"Looky here, Wayt," he said, "what the mayor

himself give me this morning. 'Pears like he's got an uneasy conscience or something."

"He's thick as ten in a bed with Fin Elder," said Smith. "I don't wonder."

"Good cigars, too," said Luther, passing them around.

They lit up and sat smoking in silence. In a few minutes Brant came in, yawning and stretching.

"Boys," he said, "ain't it a little early to be confabbing on the best manner of killing a few reptiles that need killing?"

"Sit down, Brant," said Wayt.

"I can listen on my feet," said Brant. "If I sit down I'll be nodding and then I won't be no use at all."

He walked over to a long, cracked mirror hanging on the wall and began to straighten his necktie, Brant was the only one of the crowd who ever paid any attention to his clothes. The best tailor in Tucson made his suits and he bought the most expensive shirts and hats he could find. His boots were specially made for his long, narrow feet and the heels were half an inch higher than they ought to be. He was lanky and flat chested, his face was long and pale, and his teeth were three sizes too large, but he car-

ried himself as if he thought he was the handsomest man in San Miguel County.

"Well, Brant," said Wayt, "as soon as you turn yourself around and quit fighting that mirror we'll begin."

Brant turned around.

"Wayt," he said, "it don't seem to me fitting and proper for us to be palavering this way. No sir. All we're aiming to do is kill or be killed and that's the end of it. I've been in such circumstances before this and I know what to do. If I ain't mistaken you can say the same." He reached in his coat pocket and took out a letter which he gave to Wayt. "There's my death warrant, Wayt. Them cowhands think I'm getting seedy 'cause I've held my fire so long. I'm aiming to jog their memories a bit. There ain't nothing like old Judge Colt for jogging the memory."

Wayt took the letter and glanced at it. Then he handed it to Deadwood, who read it and passed it on. It read:

Alkali is sick of a certain tin horn of the name of Brant White. The folks in Alkali would be mighty relieved if he took a train for other parts. If he can't see things in the right light, this here community is

aiming to give him a first class funeral with all fixings.

Respectfully yours,
FRIENDS OF ORDER

"And I got one similar," said Luther.

"Well," said Wayt, "I reckon we ain't got a leg to stand on. We're trussed up like colts at a branding. This here community is mighty sick of peace and the folks hereabouts won't be satisfied noways till half a dozen fellers get shot up."

"I go along with 'em," said Brant, "this town is too refined."

"Well," said Wayt, "for the last year or so I been doing my best to make Alkali a fit place to live in and I don't say I'm done, but there's a few fellers in this town that are aching to be settled and I'm not fixing to disappoint 'em."

"Better hold off a spell," said Jim.

"If young Jim ain't a fire-eater," said Brant.

"Wayt," said Smith, "you got a right good business to be thinking of."

"Smith Sanders," said Wayt, "there's the door over there. I ain't got no claim on you and as far as I'm concerned, you can declare yourself out at any time."

Smith flushed and shifted his feet, but said nothing.

"Now," said Wayt, "beings we're all of one mind, or fairly so, I got a few words to say. I'm still a Federal deputy marshal and will be till the mayor and Joe Elder bring some more pressure on Mr. Benton, a good enough man but wishy-washy. Now from this day on, you're all deputized by the Federal Government to help me rid this country of the train robbers that've been pestering the trains and carrying off the mail and such. I've heard tell that some of them are hiding in San Miguel County and I'm aiming to catch 'em and turn 'em over to Uncle Sam."

"Hurray!" said Brant. "I'm a bang-up deputy."

"Yes sir," said Wayt, "you're all deputized and don't you let me ketch one of you without a gun on, as these train robbers are mighty dangerous customers and quick on the draw."

There was a long silence and all but Smith and Deadwood sat staring at the floor. Brant and Wayt's brothers knew what this meant. Wayt's enemies had pushed him too far. He would never stop now until things were settled to suit him. Smith and Deadwood, who had known Wayt only during his Alkali days, had no idea to what lengths he would go. They had

never seen him, as Luther, Jim and Brant had, go into a saloon, where there were at least a dozen men who had threatened to kill him, and cut loose indiscriminately with two six-shooters. They had never seen him riding slowly up and down the main street of a hostile town, daring anyone to reach for a gun. They had never seen him with his back to the wall, alone, surrounded by a mob of infuriated Mexicans. They had never seen him hit a man with his fist and put two bullets in him before he struck the ground. To them he was merely big, quiet Wayt Johnson, leader of the Law and Order party; dangerous, of course, but forebearing.

"Yesterday," said Wayt, "I had a little confab with the mayor. He's plumb set against us, Luther, setting aside them campaign cigars. He was nice and oily and handshaking, but what it all come down to was this: he wanted me to withdraw my name from the ballot. Yes sir. He says it'll save a lot of bloodshed and such, as the San Jose ranchmen, meaning them lousy Tod and Northrup cattle thieves, and the miners of Elderville, won't suffer me for sheriff nohow and are aiming to kick up hell at the polls. Now I took that right unkindly."

Wayt smiled and looked at his boots. Jim sat star-

ing at Wayt. This wasn't Wayt at all, but the Pa Johnson he remembered: a big, gaunt man, who never smiled except when he was killing mad.

"But," said Wayt, "the mayor's a mighty sharp feller, being a politician, like Fin Elder, and he's right. I'll never see the sheriff's office of San Miguel County, not by a damn sight, 'less I'm arrested for a few killings or such a matter and am brung in."

No one spoke. Even Brant was awed. He stood playing with the buckle of his gunbelt and thinking about Wayt at Dodge City, Wayt at Rockford, Wayt at Trinidad. He realized that during the long peace of Alkali, he had forgotten the true Wayt and had thought of him much in the same way that the Alkali citizens thought of him: big, patient Wayt, all for peace.

"Boys," said Wayt, "I'm fed up. I done my best for the citizens of this community, but they're aiming to be bossed by cattle thieves and tin horn politicians. That's their business. But when it comes to sending us threatening letters and bullets and banging away at Luther with a shot-gun, that's ours! Now I ain't aiming to break the peace but I hereby declare that not one inch of lip will I take from ary

citizen, tin horn or such, and I'll be on the street right smart from now on."

He got to his feet, put on his hat and said:

"I'm taking a walk right now and I'd appreciate it, Brant, if you went along."

"I'm with you," said Brant.

The others watched Brant and Wayt go, then Luther said:

"Well, it's here."

"Luther," said Jim, "can't you do something?"

Luther turned and looked sharply at Jim.

"Jim Johnson," he said, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself talking like that after all you done to get Wayt in this way of looking at things."

"He's going to get himself killed," said Jim. "They'll shoot him in the back."

Luther said nothing, but got up and went out into the bar. Smith followed him, very worried, nervously rubbing his chin and trying to figure out the best thing for him to do: leave Alkali like Ed Deal, or stick it out. It was a damned risky business, keeping up with the Johnsons. All right for an old desperado like Deadwood or a reckless killer like Brant White, but no business for an ordinary gambler with no especial stomach for lead.

"Jim," said Deadwood, "best go along with Wayt and leave him to his way. It's too late to make peace talk now."

"I know," said Jim, nodding.

Deadwood followed Smith and Luther out into the bar, leaving Jim, who went to the window and stood looking out at the long row of wooden façades on the opposite side of the street. The wooden arcades were empty now, the town quiet. The sunlight was blinding and the huddled buildings flung sharp, purplish shadows out into the dusty street. Far off, the yellow buttes of the Red Hills quivered in the heat. He leaned his forehead against the window pane, full of remorse for the past, of uneasiness for the future.

When Wayt and Brant came into the blacksmith's shop they saw Walt Northrup and El Guero watching Justin shoe Walt's horse. El Guero had a gun in his belt. He turned and smiled.

"Amigo," he said, "I'm waiting for Señor Northrup. We are going to Elderville, so I carry my gun."

"Carry all the guns you please," said Wayt; "and tell all your friends to come heeled after this as far as I'm concerned. I'm enforcing no more gun-toting ordinances."

Walt Northrup didn't like the look on Wayt's face and, lowering his eyes, began to edge over behind the horse.

"You hear me, Walt Northrup?" said Wayt. "I hereby declare to you one and all, cattle thieves, tin horns and other San Jose gentry, that I'm done making arrests for trifling matters. Shoot up the town and such, get drunk and raise holy hell, but keep your mouths shut about the Johnsons!"

"I hear you, Wayt," said Walt, but he was puzzled and uneasy.

Justin dropped the horse's hoof and straightened up.

"They pushing you, Wayt?" he asked.

"They pushed me once too often," said Wayt, and Brant laughed.

El Guero, with his eyes fixed on Wayt, backed slowly to the door and went out. Walt looked at Wayt over the horse's back and said:

"Wayt, I ain't heeled."

"Get heeled," said Wayt, "and tell that fire-eating brother of yours to get heeled. I'm walking the streets tonight and I wouldn't run from no excitement nohow, not even if there was a little shooting."

"We ain't looking for no trouble, Wayt," said Walt. "We been making peace talk right along."

"Justin," said Wayt, "I'm going to bring over that black mare that Frame Tod stole from me a while back and let you put some new shoes on her."

"All right, Wayt," said Justin, looking from Wayt to Brant, then lifting the horse's hoof once more and going to work.

V

It was nearly dark when Walt Northrup found the sheriff.

"Fin," he said, "it's coming plain as daylight. Wayt Johnson's gone loco and he's round threatening everybody and begging 'em to fight. I'm plumb flumixed, as I never seen Wayt Johnson that way before."

Fin puffed himself up and took out a cigar.

"I'll have to speak to him, Walt," he said. "He'll listen to me."

"Well," said Walt, "I don't know. Maybe he will and maybe he won't. It'll take a heap of talking, Fin." Walt hesitated, shifting his feet, then he said: "Could you let me have a gun, Fin? I got to get out of this town and I'm plumb scared without an iron."

Fin pulled open a desk-drawer and turned his back.

"Don't reckon you'll find any guns in this office, Walt," he said.

Walt took a gun out of the drawer, slipped it in-

side the waistband of his trousers, and went out. El Guero had just ridden up and was waiting for him.

"Running out on me, was you!" said Walt. "Where you been?"

"With young Señor Johnson," said El Guero, who was not smiling now. "He will not listen to me. Something has happened."

Walt got on his horse and they rode toward Elderville.

"It's the Johnsons or us now," said Walt. Then after a long pause he went on: "I'm fixing to stay round Elderville for a spell."

Fin Elder met Wayt coming out of Mattie's Eating-House and put his hand on his arm.

"Wayt," he said, "I've been hearing a whole lot of war talk today. I won't have no killing in Alkali, not as long as I'm sheriff. This here is a peaceful town full of law and order."

Wayt jerked away and went on without a word.

"I've got him," thought Fin, as he sat down in the restaurant, "I've got him. He's going to bust out sure as shooting and she'll be Fin Elder's town 'fore long, like she ought to be."

PART V

I

It was nearly eight o'clock in the morning when Smith Sanders woke Luther, who was sleeping in a room back of the bar. Luther hadn't turned in till four o'clock, as the town had been wild and noisy the night before. He was fully dressed except for his boots. Smith shook him several times before he opened his eyes and sat up.

"Well?" said Luther, stretching and looking at his watch.

Before Smith could explain to him what was wrong, Jim came in.

"Luther," said Jim, "Walt Northrup's on the warpath and 'lows he's going to shoot you at sight."

Luther yawned, got out of bed, and poured some water from a pitcher into a washbasin.

"Yes sir," said Smith, "them cowboys mean business this time. I seen Joe Carmeno a little while ago and he said the Northrups was aiming to clean house 'fore sundown."

"Luther," said Jim, "don't you hear what we're saying?"

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"I hear you," said Luther.

He washed leisurely and wiped his face and hands, staring out into Main Street where a great ore wagon drawn by twelve horses was passing, shaking the buildings and taking up the whole street. Smith and Jim stood looking at each other. Finally Jim said:

"Get that sleep out of your head, Luther, and listen to what we're saying."

Luther turned and scowled at Jim.

"I hear you! I hear you!" he said. "Do you fellers expect me to get all worked up because a drunken cattle thief 'lows he's going to shoot somebody?"

He sat down and pulled on his boots, then took his gun-belt from the back of a chair and examined his revolver.

"Luther," said Smith, "this ain't no time for levity. You know what's been hanging over this town a week and more. This likely is the showdown."

"Maybe," said Luther, and Jim was suddenly reminded that Luther and Wayt, as Pa Johnson had said, were cut from the same block. He couldn't understand their carelessness in the face of danger. He was no coward; he had faced a gun more than once, but he could never be unconcerned about it. In spite of his Johnson face and build, he was a

Seward; he was like his mother's brothers, excitable and nervous.

Luther got to his feet and put on his hat.

"Smith," he said, "where's Wayt?"

"Wayt's asleep upstairs," said Jim cutting in. "We thought maybe we better see you first, as Wayt has been talking mighty murderous the last few days."

"Don't wake him," said Luther. "If them cowboys make war talk to him right now he'll kill 'em and that ain't the best thing to do with things the way they are."

He stood thinking, then he said:

"Where's this Walt Northrup hanging out, Smith?"

"Bob seen him over on Santa Ana with a rifle, might be ten minutes ago."

Luther went out, but Jim called to him:

"Better hunt Brant up or take me with you."

"Brant won't be up for four hours yet," said Luther. "Anyways, I don't need nobody to help me with them locoed rustlers. You set tight, both of you, and if Wayt wakes up, ease his mind."

"No," said Jim, his face pale, "I'm a deputy, I reckon, and I'm trailing along."

"You ain't," said Luther, pushing him back. "You're a young cub that's got a lot to learn. You stay here like I tell you and talk to Wayt case he wakes up."

"Want an extra gun, Luther?" called Smith.

"No," said Luther.

He left the Golden Girl and turned west on Archer Street. It was a calm morning with a blue sky and heavy white clouds over the San Miguel Mountains. Although the sun was bright and hot, the wind was cold. He stopped in front of Lupfer's butcher shop and looked up and down Archer Street. At the corner of Archer and Santa Ana he saw three cowboys arguing with a tall man, who was waving a rifle. Ben Lupfer called to Luther from his doorway.

"Mr. Johnson," he said, "Walt Northrup's powerful drunk and he's been prowling around here since sunup. He wants killing."

"Seen any more of the tribe?"

"No," said the butcher, "but that Mexican of theirs says the tribe is gathering today. If things don't quiet down, I'm shutting up shop."

"Never you mind," said Luther.

He hitched his holster further around, nodded to the butcher and started toward the corner. Before

he had gone ten steps one of the cowhands saw him and pointed. Then the other two turned, stared, and the three of them began to back away. The tall man with the rifle was left alone on the corner. Doors began to slam along Archer Street. Three men sitting on the balcony of the Mendes Hotel stared at Luther, then ducked in through the open windows. In less than a minute the street was deserted except for Luther and Walt Northrup. When Luther started to cross the street toward him, Walt raised his rifle hip high. He was drunk and weaving on his feet.

"Git back, Lute Johnson!" he shouted. "I ain't aiming to take no more from none of you."

Luther kept coming, his arms swinging loosely and his hat down over his eyes.

"Git back, I'm telling you," shouted Walt. "This here is the last warning."

Luther increased his pace and Walt's hands began to shake.

"I'm killing you, Lute Johnson," he cried, but Luther made a sudden dash, grabbed the barrel of the rifle and turned it aside. A bullet cut across Archer Street and buried itself in a post. Luther hit Walt with his fist, then, when he fell to the ground, kicked his revolver out of its holster.

"Little slow on the trigger, Walt," said Luther, pulling him to his feet. "We'll take a walk down to Justice Williams' and see what can be done about this."

"It's a killing matter," said Walt, trying to pull away from Luther. "Give me my six-gun and ten paces and I'll learn you something."

"You missed your chance, Walt," said Luther. "You ain't fit to handle a gun noways."

He hustled him down Santa Ana Street, followed at a distance by the three cowhands and a group of citizens. The doors of the shops were opened, the three men came out on the balcony at the Mendes Hotel, and in a moment the street was going about its business as usual.

When Luther shoved Walt into the justice's office, Henry Williams was sitting with his feet on the desk. His breakfast dishes were on a tray in front of him and he was just finishing his coffee. Charley Lung, the Chinaman from across the street, was waiting for the tray. But when Walt and Luther came in, he threw up his hands and ran out the back way.

"Charley," shouted Williams, "come get this tray."

But Charley was half a block away.

"Henry," said Luther, "here's a young feller that was aiming to shoot up the town. I took his rifle away from him and kicked out his gun. I charge him with resisting an officer and carrying concealed weapons."

"I never had no concealed weapons," said Walt, "and I wasn't bothering nobody till you come along."

"And," Luther went on, "he was drunk and disorderly and making his threats about killing him a few fellers."

"Walter Northrup," said Williams, "set yourself down and I'll tend to you later. I'm right busy at present."

The door opened and Fin Elder came in, all dressed up in a frock coat and carrying a shot-gun.

"Fin," shouted Walt, "looky here. I'm getting mighty sick of being jerked in here by these almighty Johnsons."

"Now, now," said Fin. "You was a sight drunk, Walt. I seen you."

"Well, well," said Walt, "ain't that a pity and a sin! What's this town coming to when a man can't get himself drunk no more."

"Luther," said Fin, "you just turn this feller over to me and I'll see to him."

"Just a minute, Fin," said Williams, "you're in my court at the present time and Luther hasn't got no more jurisdiction over this man. He's in my keeping."

"Henry," said Fin, "I'm surprised at you playing the Johnsons' game."

"Fin," said Luther, "I wouldn't advise you to go making that talk all over town like you been and standing up for cattle thieves and such. Wayt's right sick of it."

"Damn Wayt!" said Fin, getting red in the face.

"Whoopee!" cried Walt; "now you're talking."

"Wait a minute," said Luther. He raised his arm and pointed at Walt. "You see that skunk there? He's free. Let him loose. Give him a gun. I hereby declare that I make no more arrests of such cattle. I shoot 'em on sight."

"Give me a gun! Give me a gun!" screamed Walt. "I'll kill that Johnson."

"Luther Johnson . . ." Fin began, but Luther thrust him aside and held Walt Northrup's gun out to him. Fin took a couple of steps backward, fumbling for his revolver, but Williams jumped up suddenly and grabbed Luther's arm. Walt had got to his

feet and stood with his hat off and his eyes narrowed.

"Luther," said Williams, "don't make no fool plays."

Luther threw the gun on the desk and went out, banging the door.

"Tain't no crime to kill rattlesnakes, coyotes and Johnsons," said Walt; "that's how I'm aiming."

"I reckon you've had a lot of chances," said Williams.

Fin leaned his shot-gun against the wall and took a warrant out of his pocket.

"Here's a little something might interest you," he said to Williams.

"Wait a minute," said Williams, "I got a prisoner to dispose of."

Fin put his hand on Walt's shoulder.

"I'll be responsible for him," he said. "He's just got a drink or two under his belt and the Johnsons been badgering him."

Williams waved him aside.

"Walter Northrup," he said, "court is opened and I hereby fine you fifty dollars each on four counts and so declare that if said fines are not paid immediately I will have to lock you up in jail till same are paid."

"I won't pay!" cried Walt. "I won't pay no more fines to friends of the Johnsons."

"You'll pay or go to jail," said Williams, putting on his glasses.

"Henry," said Fin, "suspend them fines and give Walt a chance."

"I guess he's aiming to go to jail," said Williams.

In a rage Walt jerked out his billfold and counted out the fine.

"There!" he said. "There's some faro money for the Johnsons. By God, it's getting so there ain't an honest magistrate in San Miguel County."

"Fin," said Williams, "instruct your friend there that contempt of court carries a long jail term."

"Better keep still, Walt," said Fin. "You surely are up against it."

"Do I get my guns?" asked Walt.

"You do not," said Williams.

"Well," said Walt, "I reckon they still sell 'em in this God-fearing town."

He put on his hat and went out, but Fin called to him.

"Walt, wait for me. I got something to tell you."

"Fin," said Williams, "you're going to get your-

self in a heap of trouble sticking up for them no-goods."

Fin closed the door and handed Williams a warrant. It was for the arrest of Wayt and Jim Johnson for the killing of Jud Burt and Mr. Thompson. Williams glanced at it then handed it back.

"Well," he said, "my advice is, you better hold it for a spell, as the Johnsons are a mighty restive lot right now."

"I'm just carrying it in case I need a lever," said Fin.

Williams laughed.

"Didn't think you figured on serving it," he said.

Fin snorted, puffed out his chest, then went out, banging the door.

II

At about eleven o'clock Poe Northrup rode into town, followed by El Guero, and Frame and Joe Tod. They hitched their horses to the rack in front of the Transcontinental and went in. Deadwood was standing at the desk talking to Lem Burns, the proprietor. Poe grabbed him by the shoulder and whirled him around, and Joe Tod hit him with the butt of his gun, knocking him to the floor. Then Poe and El Guero walked back into the bar.

"One for the Johnsons!" said Frame Tod, throwing back his head and laughing.

Joe Tod took Deadwood's gun away from him and handed it over the desk to Lem Burns, then the Tods hustled him to his feet and shoved him toward the door.

"This here hotel ain't no place for Johnsons," said Frame Tod.

"Git!" said Joe Tod, kicking Deadwood.

Still dazed from the blow, Deadwood staggered across Main Street and went into the Golden Girl.

Brant White was standing at the bar looking at himself in the mirror, and Luther was just beyond him, talking to Henry Williams. Jim and Smith Sanders were behind the bar. Deadwood was pale and a thin trickle of blood was running down over his right ear.

"Well," said Brant, laughing, "did you get throwed against a hitching rack?"

"Where's Wayt?" demanded Deadwood.

"Ain't come down yet," said Brant.

"What's wrong?" asked Luther.

"Nothing," said Deadwood, who left the bar and went out into the passage.

"Trouble sure enough," said Luther.

"Remember what I said," Williams cautioned him, then he finished his whiskey at the bar and went out.

Wayt was just leaving his room when Deadwood came up. He put his hand on Deadwood's shoulder.

"What's all the blood for?" he inquired, smiling. "Got any enemies?"

"Wayt," said Deadwood, "the showdown sure enough has come."

Then he told Wayt what had happened at the Transcontinental. Wayt said nothing but motioned for him to follow and went downstairs, crossed the

bar without speaking to Luther or any of his men and went out into Main Street. They all shouted at him but he paid no attention. Jim reached under the bar for his gun-belt and hastily strapped it on, his hands shaking. Smith Sanders stood with his hands on the bar, his face white.

"Wayt's aiming to kill somebody," said Luther, "so law and order is a thing of the past."

"Hurray!" said Brant, leaving the bar and going back to the faro table for his shot-gun.

They saw Wayt go into the Transcontinental, followed by Deadwood.

"We'll give 'em a minute," said Luther.

When Wayt entered the lobby of the hotel Frame and Joe Tod were leaning against the desk. Wayt turned, took a small revolver from his pocket and handed it to Deadwood.

"Shoot to kill," he said.

Frame Tod stood nervously flourishing his quirt. Joe took a couple of steps away from Wayt, then said:

"We ain't looking for trouble, Wayt."

"You got it," said Wayt, then to Lem Burns, who was trying to get down behind the desk: "Give Deadwood his gun."

"Yes sir," said Lem Burns, reaching under the desk and putting the gun on the hotel register.

Wayt stood with his hand on the butt of his gun. Joe raised his hands slowly and put them on the desk in plain sight. Frame stood striking at his boots with his quirt.

"Mr. Johnson," said Lem Burns, "don't count me in on nothing. I ain't in this here argument one way or another."

"Joe," said Wayt, ignoring Burns, "what you got to say for yourself?"

"Well," said Joe, "Deadwood cussed me out."

"Never said a word," said Deadwood.

Wayt laughed.

"Why don't you get out a gun, one of you tough hombres?" he said. "I thought you was looking for trouble."

"We was just cutting up some," said Joe. "What the hell, Wayt! Can't we cut up a little?"

Wayt stood staring at them, then he laughed, turned his back and walked out, followed by Deadwood, who had a gun in each hand, and kept his eyes on the Tods.

Luther and Brant were standing on the sidewalk in front of the Golden Girl. Luther had shed his coat

and was carrying two guns; Brant had a shot-gun on a sling over his right shoulder.

"Well," said Wayt, "I tried to make them Tods fight, but there ain't no fight in 'em."

"We'll make 'em fight," said Brant. "I'm tired of the peace and quiet of this here town."

Luther drew Wayt aside and said:

"Fin's got a warrant for you and Jim."

Wayt laughed.

"Let him try and serve it," he said. "From now on I'm done with law and order. I done the best I could to make the gents of this community see the light, but they want war and that's what they get."

"Wayt . . ." Luther began.

"But," Wayt interrupted him, "as long as we got the law on our side, we might as well take advantage of it, is how I figure. The Tods and Northrups constitute an armed gathering that ain't healthy for the peace of this community. I aim to disperse 'em or kill 'em. Let's go eat."

"Good," said Luther. "But can't we keep Jimmy out of this runkus?"

"I was figuring on that," said Wayt, "and sort of 'lowing to myself I'd been a sight hasty regarding

initiating Jimmy into the ranks of two-gun men. We'll keep him out."

"And Smith ain't worth a dern," said Luther. "He's so scairt he couldn't hit a barn."

"He's just in the way, that's a fact," said Wayt.

While they were talking, Poe Northrup and El Guero came out of the Transcontinental, followed by Joe and Frame Tod. Brant unslung his shot-gun and Deadwood stood away from the wall where he had been leaning. But without looking at the group in front of the Golden Girl, Poe and his men got on their horses and rode north on Main toward the North End Corral.

"Hi!" shouted Brant. "Where you fellers going? Did Wayt put the fear of God in you?"

"Hell no!" shouted Poe Northrup, laughing.

After a short conference, Brant and Deadwood went inside the Golden Girl and Luther and Wayt went down to Mattie's Eating-House.

The town was quiet, too quiet. Rumors of the impending fight had spread all over the community. The women kept indoors; children were taken to school for the afternoon session by their fathers; miners left their work in the hills west of town to

see the fun and stood in little, silent groups at the main corners; the stores were deserted.

While Luther and Wayt were eating, Fin Elder came in and stood at their table.

"What do you want?" Luther demanded.

"Boys," said Fin, "the whole town is roused and the mayor and me are aiming to stop this fight. Now as sheriff of San Miguel County I'm asking you boys peaceable-like to give up your arms and stay off the streets."

Luther jerked his thumb toward the door.

"Git!"

"Fin," said Wayt, "I understand you got a warrant for me."

Fin stammered and got red in the face.

"Don't try to serve it," said Wayt, "or we'll have to be classing you with the cowboys, which would be a mighty sad thing for your wife and children."

"Boys," said Fin, "I'm begging you to give up your arms and help me keep the peace."

"As to giving up our guns," said Wayt, "we ain't considering that, but we're aiming to help you keep the peace. As soon as our dinner shakes down we're hunting up the cowboys and disarm 'em."

"It'll come to killing," said Fin.

"Not if you go disarm 'em first," said Wayt.

Luther laughed and shook his head.

"I'll do it," said Fin, "by God, I'll do it."

"Good for you," said Wayt.

Fin went out swaggering. Mattie came over to them, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Don't get yourself killed, Wayt Johnson," she said.

"Don't you worry none," said Wayt. "I'll eat my supper right here."

III

At two o'clock Wayt and Luther were standing in front of the Golden Girl, talking. Brant was dealing faro and Deadwood was lying in a back room with a cold towel on his head. Jim was behind the bar with Smith. The town was quiet.

Since noon it had been getting steadily cooler. A slow wind was blowing across the desert land west of the Red Hills. Luther had his coat on now and Wayt had put on a pair of driving gloves.

Little groups were standing at all the main corners from the Mexican settlement at the north of town to Huston on the south. Men passing the Golden Girl stared at the Johnsons and noticed that though they seemed to be talking carelessly, they were really watching. Cowhands from the San Jose Valley kept the street between them and the Johnsons. One drunken miner stopped in front of Wayt and said:

"Well, Mr. Johnson, when does the ball open?"

Wayt gave him a gentle shove and he went on down the street.

At a little after two the stage came in from War Bonnet and George Stanley and another deputy got out. They were carrying rifles and without looking at the Johnsons, hurried into the Transcontinental Hotel.

"Well?" said Wayt.

"Might as well get started," said Luther. "Looks to me like they're aiming to stop us."

Wayt nodded and turned to go into the Golden Girl, but he heard a horse coming up Archer Street at a gallop. It was Joe Tod and he was beating his horse over the head with his quirt and whooping. He made the turn at the Golden Girl and thumbed his nose at the Johnsons. There was a chorus of jeers from the group of cowhands in front of the Transcontinental.

"He was wearing a gun, Wayt," said Luther.

Without speaking Wayt started into the Golden Girl, but Mr. Dixon turned the corner of Archer and called to him.

"Wayt," he said, "I want to see you."

"All right," said Wayt, "but hurry it up, Mr. Dixon, as I've got some important business to tend to."

"Wayt," said Mr. Dixon, "Joe Tod is making his

boasts all over town that he and his men are going to rid this community of the Johnsons this afternoon. He's carrying two six-guns and a rifle."

"Thank you," said Wayt.

Mr. Dixon nodded and went on down Main toward his gun store. Wayt and Luther went into the Golden Girl. Brant White looked up from his faro table, saw the expression on Wayt's face, and motioned for Lou Berry to take his place at the box. Then he got slowly to his feet, stretched, and picked up his shot-gun by the strap. Jim stood with his hands on the bar; he felt suddenly sick at his stomach. Smith tried to pour some whiskey for a miner but spilled it on the bar.

"Jim," said Wayt, "get Deadwood."

"Wayt," said Jim, "I know what you're aiming to do and I'm going along."

"Get Deadwood."

Jim went after Deadwood and Wayt turned to Smith.

"We won't be needing you, Smith," he said.

Smith lowered his eyes, his hands still shaking.

"We need steady hands," said Luther.

"Hell," said Smith, his eyes flashing, "I'm mighty

willing to stay out of this runkus. I ain't looking for a chance to die for the Johnsons. It's a fool play and there won't no good come of it"

"Shut your mouth," said Luther.

Jim came back with Deadwood, who was buttoning his shirt and buckling on a gun belt.

"How you feeling, Deadwood?" Wayt asked.

"Fine."

"You don't look none too steady on your feet," said Smith.

"Shut up!" shouted Deadwood, turning on Smith. "I heard enough of you and your backsliding remarks. You ought to hang your head before the Johnsons."

"Now, now," said Wayt.

Brant stood looking in the big mirror behind the bar, fixing his tie.

"Wayt," said Jim, "I'm going. I'm a sure enough deputy and I'm going along."

"You stay here," said Luther. "We got all the guns we need."

"No," said Jim, "I'm going."

Wayt put his hand on Jim's shoulder.

"Jim," he said, "I was a little hasty shoving you

into a fight that ain't none of yours. You stay here and look out for the Golden Girl case there's any back lashing. The cowboys have got a heap of friends. We're figuring you're the best man we got to be looking after our interests here. We need you back here, Jimmy."

Jim lowered his eyes. He knew that Wayt was lying, but he couldn't help feeling relieved. It was a way out for him. Poe Northrup was a dead shot; so was El Guero. Somebody was going to get killed. He didn't have the stomach for killing. He had seen many a man planted in Boot Hill Cemetery for getting in the way of a bullet: there was a perfunctory ceremony, then a rough wooden box was lowered into the ground and stones heaped over the grave to save the corpse from the coyotes.

"I'll stay, Wayt," he said.

Wayt turned to the others.

"Come on," he said.

He went out into Main Street followed by Luther, Deadwood and Brant, who had slung his shot-gun under his coat on his right shoulder and was humming softly.

A group of citizens was standing on the sidewalk in front of the post office and when Wayt and his

men came abreast of them, Mr. Wingett stepped out and took Wayt by the arm.

"Wayt," he said, "keep the peace. We been informed that you and the cowboys are spoiling for a fight, but keep the peace. The decent folks of this here community are backing you, Wayt."

"Mr. Wingett," said Wayt, "we're aiming to disarm a passel of drunken cowhands."

"You're aiming to kill 'em, Wayt Johnson," said Wingett, "and it ain't got nothing to do with law and order nohow. It's your finish in this here community."

"Come on," said Wayt.

"Too late for peace talk, Mr. Wingett," said Brant, grinning.

Wayt walked at the outer edge of the sidewalk and a little ahead of the rest. Luther was on the inside and Deadwood and Brant walked together a step back of Luther. The people they passed stared at them, then turned to watch their steady march up the street. They walked silently without looking at anyone, without answering the salutations from men standing in the doorways. Near Bonanza Street Mr. Dixon stepped up to Wayt and said:

"Fin disarmed Walt Northrup, Wayt. Look out

you don't put yourself in bad and get held for murder."

"Where's the cowboys?" asked Wayt.

"At the North End Corral," said Mr. Dixon, then he stepped back into his doorway and stood watching.

As they passed Moore's barber shop, Fin Elder rushed out minus his coat and with a smear of lather on his chin and grabbed Wayt by the arm.

"Wayt Johnson," he cried, "for the last time I'm asking you, don't break the peace."

Wayt shook him off with a movement of his shoulder and they went on. But Fin ran ahead of them with his holster bumping on his hip and his hair flying.

The north end of Main Street takes a turning to the left and cuts at an angle toward the railroad station. The gate of the corral was open and when they came to the turning, Wayt saw Poe Northrup, Frame and Joe Tod and El Guero sitting on their horses in the gateway. Walt Northrup was standing with his hand on Joe Tod's stirrup, talking to him. Wayt saw Fin run up to them and shout at them, waving his arms. El Guero turned his horse's head and rode off quickly toward the west end of the

corral and out the far gate. Walt Northrup turned, stared at the Johnsons, then made a dash out into Main Street. Brant swung his shot-gun round but Wayt touched his arm. "Let him go," he said.

Wayt saw Poe Northrup throw back his head and laugh. Frame Tod's horse shied and capered and turned half around, and Joe leaned over and grabbed the bridle. Fin continued to shout at them, but Poe Northrup vigorously shook his head. Then Fin turned and, running distractedly, met the Johnsons.

"Wayt," he said, "give up your arms. You're under arrest for attempting to disturb the peace."

Wayt swung Fin around and gave him a shove.

"Git!"

Fin stared at them for a moment, then ran into the doorway of Anderson's photograph shop and stood peering round the corner.

"Here they come," shouted Poe Northrup.

Joe Tod tried to pull his rifle from the scabbard, but it stuck.

"All right, Luther," said Wayt.

"Fellers!" shouted Luther, "you've disturbed the peace of Alkali for the last time. Give up your arms or fight."

"Throw up your hands," cried Brant, raising his shot-gun.

Frame Tod, suddenly pale, threw up his hands and cried: "Don't shoot me! I don't want to fight!"

But Poe Northrup reached for his gun and Brant fired, hitting Frame Tod. Joe Tod's horse lunged, throwing him to the ground, but he lit with his gun in his hand and at the first shot hit Deadwood, whose right hand dropped limp. Walt Northrup ran out from a doorway and seized Wayt by the arm.

"You're a-killing 'em!" he shouted.

Wayt shook him off.

"Fight or git," he said, and Walt ran south on Main Street and was pulled into the doorway of Anderson's shop by Fin Elder.

Frame Tod was down on his knees now with a charge of buckshot in his body. His face was pale and tears were running down his cheeks. He sank lower and lower but he managed to get his gun out and, propping himself up on his elbow, fired, hitting Luther, who stumbled and nearly fell. A second blast from Brant's shot-gun turned Joe Tod half around, but he didn't fall and kept firing. After emptying his second gun, Luther fell flat with his

arms spread. Deadwood was leaning against a wall, firing with his left hand. Wayt and Brant were uninjured.

"I'm killed!" cried Frame Tod, lowering his gun.

Poe Northrup flung away his empty gun and reached for another, but Deadwood dropped him from his saddle. He lay on his side, dying, and tried to shield his head from his plunging horse. Brant White threw away his shot-gun and advanced on Joe Tod, who was on his knees steadying his hand.

"You're a goner, Brant," he said.

But Brant turned sideways suddenly as Joe fired and the bullet cut the strap of his gun-belt and it fell down around his feet. Wayt hit Joe as he was steadying his hand for another shot. The firing ceased.

"Pull off my boots," cried Frame Tod. "For the love of God somebody pull off my boots."

Luther started to get to his feet and Wayt turned to help him.

"Hit bad, Luther?"

"No," said Luther; "I got it in the leg first, but one nicked me on the temple and floored me."

"Nary a scratch," said Brant, picking up his shot-gun.

"Frame," called Joe Tod, "are you still here?"

"Joe," cried Frame, "for the love of God pull off my boots."

"Die like a man and get it done with," said Brant.

Men came running from all directions, climbing the corral fence, hurdling hitching racks, jumping down from porch roofs. Two miners carried Frame Tod into Anderson's photograph shop, where he begged them to pull off his boots because he'd promised his mother he'd die in bed with his boots off. They took off his boots and tried to make him comfortable while someone went for Doc Harley, but it was no use. He died in a few minutes, cursing the Johnsons. Poe Northrup was dead when they reached him. But Joe Tod was not badly wounded and was taken in a wagon to the Transcontinental.

"Boys," he said, "you ain't heard the last of this runkus."

But a cowhand cautioned him.

"Wait till you're on your feet, Joe, before you make war talk."

Brant and Wayt took Luther between them and helped him down Main Street and into the Golden Girl. Deadwood, with his right hand stuck in the front of his shirt, followed. He had a gun in his left

hand and he kept running his eyes over the crowd which drew back to allow the Johnsons to pass.

"They killed Luther!" cried Jim, when he saw them bringing him in.

"Nothing like it, Jimmy," said Luther.

IV

Doc Harley had just finished bandaging Luther, who was propped up in bed, smoking. Wayt put his hand on Doc's shoulder.

"How about Joe Tod?"

"Well," said Doc Harley, "he's going to pull through all right if he don't get him some infection. They're moving him home tonight, which ain't healthy noways, but it's healthier, thinks Joe, than being across the street from the Johnsons."

"We ain't shooting wounded men," said Wayt.

"You can't tell Joe that," said Doc Harley.

He nodded to them, put on his hat and went out. Luther took his badge off his shirt and handed it to Wayt.

"Here you are, Wayt," he said. "Pin this thing on. Till I get back on my feet you're town marshal."

Wayt pinned the badge on, but said nothing. Luther sat pulling at his cigarette and staring at the wall. Finally Wayt got to his feet.

"I'm going down, Lute," he said. "Want anything?"

"No," said Luther, "but keep your eyes open."

When Wayt came into the bar Deadwood, with his arm in a sling, and Brant were talking to Jim and Smith.

"Wayt," said Brant, "we're going to be arrested, did you know it? Now I like that."

He threw back his head and laughed.

"I expected it," said Wayt, leaning on the bar; "but I ain't ready for no arresting yet, not by a long ways."

While they were talking, Fin Elder came in the front door, followed by George Stanley and another deputy. The deputies were carrying rifles.

"Howdy, Fin," said Brant. "I never in my life knew a man as fat as you could run so fast."

Miners and townsmen crowded in behind Fin and his deputies.

"Wayt," said Fin, "I hereby arrest you and your men for the murder of Poe Northrup and Frame Tod. Being's Luther is full of lead, he ain't included, which was my own notion."

"Fin," said Wayt, "I'm aiming to stand trial if the community says so, but I ain't ready for no arresting yet."

"Come peaceable-like, Wayt," said Fin.

"I ain't coming at all."

There was a long silence. Jim poured Wayt a drink and Deadwood turned his left side to the deputies and hooked the thumb of his good hand in his gun-belt.

"Wayt," said Fin, "I ask you like a gentleman. Come with me to the jail."

"No," said Wayt.

The deputies began to eye each other. Fin cleared his throat and scratched his head, then he turned and walked out of the Golden Girl and into the crowd, which surged round him, some urging him to arrest the Johnsons or kill them, some jeering at him.

"We're just trying to do our duty, Wayt," said George Stanley, as he and the other deputy backed out.

"Never you mind," said Wayt.

V

At midnight the streets were full of men waiting for the extra edition of the *Herald* which had been promised. When it came out there was a rush for papers. Jim bought one and brought it to Wayt, who was sitting with Luther. Wayt spread it out on the bed. The headline said:

ANARCHY IN ALKALI

Then there was a long account of the gun battle; an extravagant eulogy of Fin Elder, who, said the *Herald*, had done everything in his power to stop the fight; a touching story of "poor little Frame Tod" and how he had begged the Johnsons not to kill him.

Another article told how Wayt Johnson, backed by an armed force of desperate men, had dared Fin Elder to try and arrest him. The *Herald* demanded that the Johnsons be sent to the Yuma penitentiary.

Wayt read the paper carefully, then he put his hand on Luther's shoulder and said:

"Luther, I reckon we overplayed our hands for

once. There's going to be a heap of trouble in this here town before we're much older."

Fin Elder was a hero in Alkali. He swaggered through the streets, talking to everybody, back-slapping voters in the traditional manner, playing the big man. He was satisfied. Wayt Johnson had finally done just what he had hoped he would do: made a fool play. Wayt was through in Alkali; nobody knew that better than Fin. Wayt would never be elected to office now, not even with Henry Williams, Will Price and the Wingett faction behind him. The town was set against the Johnsons.

"Proved what they were at last," said Fin to a group of miners. "They been imposing on the sympathies of this here community for nigh a year. Nothing but two-gun men with badges, that's the Johnsons!"

"You're right, Fin," said the miners.

VI

No one worked in Alkali. The mines were idle and the stores were closed. From the west end of Bonanza Street, where the mesa slopes down into the desert plain, to the corner of Main and Bonanza on the east, crowds of men, who were unable to get into Justice Williams's court, were lounging in groups. A small Johnson faction, led by Justin, the blacksmith, was patrolling the street. And a dozen cowboys, all armed, were riding up and down, leaning from their saddles to talk to their friends standing on the sidewalk, making threats against the Johnsons, begging everybody to see that justice was done. El Guero rode at the head of the cowboys and smiled at all who spoke to him, and sometimes took off his hat and bowed.

George Stanley and two other deputies were standing on the sidewalk in front of the courthouse, barring the way, and Jim Johnson, with a badge conspicuously displayed, was sitting on a bench near the door with Brant's shot-gun across his knees. At

intervals the cowboys rode past the courthouse, and El Guero, smiling and bowing, would jeer at Jim and ask him when the Johnsons expected to stretch rope. El Guero was a great favorite that day. Many who could not stomach Mexicans, pointed out that El Guero had blonde hair, light eyes, that he was only part Mexican at most, was nearly white.

All along Main Street and east on Bonanza, wagons and traps were hitched. Ranchmen from as far away as Lower Big Bend were there to see that justice was done. The small settlers from the San Jose Valley were Johnson men, remembering that Wayt had rid them of Miguel Soto, but the big cattlemen were for the cowboys and some of them brought as many as a dozen of their hands with them, all armed. As Wayt Johnson was in court being tried and Luther laid up with wounds, the city was in charge of Fin Elder and his deputies, and Fin turned his back when he saw armed men, not even troubling to disarm the members of the Johnson faction. If it came to open war, what could one man and a few deputies do! It would all be laid to the Johnsons anyway.

Though the court had been in session since early morning, people were still pouring into Alkali from Elderville, from Holmesburg, from such distant

towns as Big Mesa on the south and War Bonnet on the west. Covered wagons, bull carts, Mexican carretas were crossing the desert plain to the west, coming through the gap between the San Miguel Mountains and the Painter Creek Hills. The stage from Holmesburg was jammed and had been escorted for nearly ten miles by a crowd of drunken cowboys from Upper Coyote Flats. Half-breeds and friendly Apaches poured in from the southeast, riding their bony little nags without saddles, and whooping and yelling, taking advantage of the breakdown of the law in Alkali.

The sheriff of Jaurez County had arrived early in the morning with three deputies and though he had no jurisdiction in San Miguel County, he had been asked by the Federal marshal to aid Fin Elder in keeping order. He had known Wayt Johnson in Rockford and thoroughly disliked him. He also knew Brant White and had been slapped by him before a crowded bar. He sat in his saddle in front of the courthouse with his right leg over the pommel, smiling at the cowboys, and hoping that the town would see fit to hang the Johnsons or, at the very least, to run them out.

Mr. Dixon, a quiet little man but fearless, was sit-

ting beside Jim Johnson on the bench in front of the courthouse. His eyes were shining behind the thick lenses of his glasses and he looked determined. He had a Winchester across his knees. From time to time he called Justin to him and they talked in low tones. Smith Sanders had stayed at the Golden Girl to take care of Luther, whose leg was not healing as it should, but Smith had lost his nerve and went about with a white face, starting at every sound.

The little courtroom was crowded. Henry Williams was sitting at his table, his spectacles pushed down nearly to the tip of his nose, calmly reading his findings from a thick manuscript. Deadwood, Wayt and Brant were sitting side by side at the left of Williams' table. Deadwood sat looking at the floor, twisting his hat and shuffling his feet. Brant, newly shaved, brushed and washed, squirmed about in his seat, crossed and uncrossed his long legs, and smiled at the men in the crowded courtroom who were glaring at him. Wayt hardly moved and sat with his eyes fixed on Justice Williams. Two emergency deputies, armed with revolvers and clubs, patrolled the courtroom, keeping order.

The day was cool and fair. Beyond Justice Williams' table was a big window framing a picture of

the San Miguel Mountains, serene in the sun, the long, low desert plain beyond the mesa, and the row of dwarfed cottonwoods along the dry creek bed. There was no wind. The landscape was as still as if painted, except for a few buzzards soaring far off.

The courtroom was very quiet. The talking of the men in the street beyond the locked doors drifted in, a part of the silence. Justice Williams read his findings without emphasis, tapping on his table with a pencil. The crowd was motionless, staring at Williams.

Brant leaned over and whispered to Wayt:

"It's as good as a show."

Wayt nodded.

There was a murmur from the crowd and Williams rapped for order.

"This court," he said, "is not to be interrupted by a bunch of men who'd be better off at their jobs and not idling around and gaping. The next sound I hear I'll clear the court."

He stared up over his glasses. There wasn't a sound. He waited for a little while, then went on with his reading.

The crowd was restless and held in only by an effort. The justice had been reading his blasted paper

for over an hour and they couldn't make heads nor tails of it. It was so much hocus-pocus. A lot of legal words that nobody but a shyster could understand nohow. Now in the old days, before the Johnsons came, things were simpler. If a man needed hanging, why, he was hung and that was the end of it. There wasn't no lawyers butting in with a lot of chin music, trying to pull the wool over your eyes with words nobody ever heard of. Yes sir. This here so-called justice was a damn silly thing and invented by Easterners who didn't know a cow-pony from a Texas steer.

Williams began to tap loudly with his pencil now, to emphasize his points.

"I cannot believe this theory," he read, "and cannot resist the firm conviction that the Johnsons acted wisely, discreetly and prudentially to secure their own self-preservation; they saw at once the dire necessity of giving the first shot to save themselves from certain death. They acted; their shots were effective and this alone saved all of them from being slain."

The men in the crowd began to raise their eyebrows and stare at one another. They got the drift

now. The Johnsons had bought up the Justice and were going free.

"In view of all these facts and circumstances of the case, considering the threats made, the character and position of the parties, and the tragical results accomplished in manner and form as they were, with all surrounding influence bearing on the *res gestae* of the affair, I cannot resist the conclusion that the defendants were fully justified in committing these homicides, that it was a necessary act in the discharge of an official duty."

Williams cleared his throat and looked around the courtroom. Brant put his hand on Wayt's knee and when Wayt looked up at him he grinned. There was a movement at the back of the courtroom and somebody tried to get out of the door but was shoved back by a deputy. Williams cautioned them again and went on with his reading. After a long and involved explanation of his point of view, unintelligible to the crowd he read on:

"It may be that my judgment is erroneous and my views of the law incorrect, yet it is my own judgment and my understanding of the law as I find it laid down, and upon these I must act and decide, and not upon those of any other person. I have given over two weeks of patient attention to

the hearing of the evidence in this case, and at least four-fifths of my working hours have been devoted all this time to an earnest study of the evidence before me, and such is the conclusion to which I am forced to arrive.

"I conclude the performance of the duty imposed on me by saying in the language of the Statute. 'There being no sufficient cause to believe the within named Wayt Seward Johnson, John B. White, Luther Robert Johnson, and Lafayette Hull, known as Deadwood, guilty of the offense mentioned within, I order them released.' "

There was a short silence, followed by some feeble cheering. Then the door was opened by a deputy and the crowd poured out into the street, jeering and arguing. Henry Williams stood up, took off his glasses and wiped them, then turned to Wayt.

"You're a free man, Wayt," he said. "I request you to put Luther's badge back on and see that order is restored to this here town. But," he held up a forefinger and shook it, "with a minimum of killing."

Wayt, Deadwood and Brant shook hands with Williams, then they were given their guns by a deputy, who tried to appear very friendly. Justin came in followed by Jim Johnson. A crowd was waiting in front of the courthouse to see the Johnson party come out. Jim handed Wayt the badge.

"Wayt," said Justin, "that's a bad crowd out there, I'm telling you. Wouldn't it be a good notion to stick here in this court for a spell?"

Wayt shook his head, then he called to Williams:

"Henry, are you fixing to go home? If you are, I'll walk a ways with you."

Williams looked at the floor, then said:

"I'll take my chances, Wayt. It wouldn't look right."

"Better think it over," said Wayt.

"No," said Williams, "I'll stay here a spell and sort of straighten things up."

Wayt turned to the deputy.

"Son," he said, "stay with Henry and see that nothing happens to him. I wouldn't take it kindly if he'd get in a runkus."

The deputy stammered and nodded.

Wayt went out, followed by Deadwood, Brant, Jim and Justin. The crowd was packed from the sidewalk in front of the courthouse to the fronts of the stores and houses across the street.

"Kill that Johnson!" shouted somebody.

Brant pushed back his hat and yawned. Wayt climbed up on the bench at the side of the door and waved his arms for silence.

"Gents," he shouted, above the jeers, "my brother Luther is laid up by bullets fired by a bunch of killing skunks and I'm doing his job for him. I'm town marshal till further notice. Now I want you all to git! I'm not asking you to, I'm telling you to git. From now on this town is peaceful."

He climbed down. Brant drew his gun and put his back up against the wall. Mr. Dixon and Justin stood shoulder to shoulder with Wayt and Deadwood. Jim was a little to the left of them, with one foot on the bench and Brant's shot-gun on his knee. His face was white and he kept wetting his lips.

The jeering swelled, then gradually died away. Men in the front ranks started to draw back, crowding those behind them. Cowhands unhitched their horses and led them through the crowd. El Guero had disappeared. Little by little the mob dispersed.

At the edge of the crowd someone shouted:

"We'll see you hung yet, Wayt Johnson."

Brant started toward the voice, but Wayt stopped him.

"They're getting peaceable, Brant," he said. "Let 'em work off a little steam in talking.

VII

WAYT had been in his room about an hour when Jim came in. Wayt was sitting with his feet on the bed, reading the *Herald*. Jim stood looking over his shoulder.

"Well?" said Wayt.

Jim shifted his feet and said nothing. Wayt put down his paper and glanced up at his brother.

"What do you want, Jim?"

"Wayt," said Jim, flushing, "I was dead scared you wasn't going to get justice with all that crowd trying to intimidate Henry Williams."

"Well," said Wayt, "we got it."

Jim sat down on the bed and looked at the floor.

"It's been mostly my fault, Wayt," he said. "I know I ain't been a decent brother to you."

Wayt rubbed his chin and stared off across the room, avoiding Jim's eyes when he looked up.

"I know I ain't been the kind of brother I should've been nohow," said Jim.

"Never you mind," said Wayt, shifting about in his chair, very uncomfortable.

"Wayt," Jim went on, "when Luther told me to go down to that courthouse and take me a gun, I was plumb scared. I ain't going to lie. I was scared so bad I didn't know what I was doing hardly. But Luther says, here I am laid up and can't help Wayt noway. So I got Brant's gun and went down." There was a long pause Wayt, very much embarrassed, kept clearing his throat. Jim leaned forward slightly and put his hand on Wayt's knee. "Didn't I help you some, Wayt?"

There was another pause, then Wayt said:

"You done fine, Jimmy. You never flinched and you done a man's job."

Jim got up and went to the door.

"I'll be getting downstairs now," he said.

Wayt cleared his throat and picked up his paper, but when Jim had gone, he went back to Luther's room. Luther was sitting in a chair by the bed. His hands were clenched on his knees, his face was contorted with pain, and beads of sweat were standing out all over his forehead.

"How you coming, Luther?" asked Wayt.

"That old leg is giving me hell," said Luther. "If she don't slow down some, I'm going to have her cut right off and get me a wooden one."

Wayt sat down and waited for the pain to ease off a little. Luther lit a cigar and tried to make himself comfortable. After a while he gave a long sigh and said:

"That's some better. Wayt, you'd think that leg had sense and was trying to plague me a purpose. Just as soon as I get to feeling like the end has come, she gets nice and quits hurting; and then when I figure I'm about ready for the saddle, she cuts up scandalous."

Luther shifted about in his chair and tried his bad leg in a new position.

"There," he said; "she's near stopped for the time being."

"Luther," said Wayt, "Jim sure showed his mettle down to the courthouse. He's clear strain, Luther, if he is a little rattle-headed. I'm mighty proud of that boy."

"The old lady surely had a fancy for him," said Luther, "and him the orneriest youngster I ever seen."

"Pa was some taken with him too," said Wayt, "even if he didn't let on."

They sat smoking and avoiding each other's eyes. Then Wayt got up.

"Well," he said, "I'm making my rounds. The town's mighty quiet considering."

"Keep to the inside on the sidewalk, Wayt, and keep your eyes open for ambush. We ain't done with them skunks yet."

"See you later," said Wayt.

PART VI

I

It was eight o'clock when Wayt, Brant and Deadwood reached the courthouse. They had turned east on Archer and taken Santa Ana Street to avoid the crowds celebrating the latest victory over the Johnsons. Wayt had been removed as Federal deputy marshal. All three of the Alkali papers had got out special extras, and there were groups under every street-lamp, reading the papers and discussing the possible result of this new turn of events. Wayt had not only been removed but had been censured by E. L. Benton, the Federal marshal in Arizona, for his part in the killing of Poe Northrup and Frame Tod, and the letter of censure had not only been sent to Wayt but to the county authorities, who had turned it over to the newspapers. It was printed in full and commented on at length. The sidewalks in front of the newspaper offices were packed, as Alkali had been promised more news later, which was to be placed on the bulletin-boards.

When Wayt and his men knocked at the court-

house door, they were let in by a deputy, who didn't speak to them, but turned and started into the offices of the City Council. Henry Williams, Will Price and Marcus Wingett were sitting round a big table, smoking.

"Howdy, boys," said Wingett; "sit down."

They took off their hats and sat down.

"Well," said Wayt, "here we are."

Williams puffed on his cigar for a moment, then he said:

"Wayt, I'm speaking for those present and I want you to know that we think justice ain't been done noway. We've already petitioned the government to reinstate you, as we need men like you in this community. We all know that Mr. Benton is a good man and has done his part to help us clean up this county, but he's been misinformed."

"Wait a minute," said Wingett, holding up his hand, "you ain't speaking for me personally, Henry Williams, but only for the City Council. Here's my word. I think Wayt Johnson was some hasty in shooting down them cowboys. I think he showed as little regard for the peace of this town as the lawless element themselves, and I don't know if I'm dead against Mr. Benton for his move, but what I do say

is this: we need Wayt Johnson. This here city is verging on anarchy and if she ain't settled it won't be no safe place for our wives and children nohow."

"Henry said my word for me, Wayt," said Will Price.

"Yes," said Williams, "and for many another."

"Gentlemen," said Wayt, "all this talk against me and so on that you're reading in the papers is the work of Fin Elder and I don't take it kindly in you, Mr. Wingett, tooting his horn."

"He needs killing," said Brant.

There was a short silence, then Henry Williams went on:

"Well, no matter for that. But what we're saying is, we want you for permanent town marshal, Wayt. Since Luther's been on his back this town ain't been the same town. There's been a sight of agitation to give George Stanley the badge, but that would be turning the whole community over to the sheriff's office and you know what that means."

"I surely do," said Wayt.

"Well," said Wingett, "I'm honest, Wayt, and I'm saying that I'm disappointed in you, but we need you for town marshal and that's the long and short of it. What do you say?"

Wayt laughed.

"I'd be a fool not to say yes," he said. "But I got to run the town to suit myself and appoint who I please deputies when I need 'em. I won't have no interference noways."

"That means," said Wingett, turning to Williams and Will Price, "Brant White and Lafe Hull."

"Well," said Williams, smiling slightly, "where would you find two better men?"

Wingett said nothing but sat fumbling with his cigar. He couldn't say what he wanted to say: that Deadwood, though an old army scout with an honorable discharge, had been a highwayman in his young days; that Brant White was a cold-blooded killer, who had never done a tap of honest work in his life.

"Well?" said Wayt.

"All right with me," said Wingett.

Williams called to the deputy and handed him three sheets of paper.

"Joe," he said, "get these up on the bulletin boards as fast as you know how."

The deputy glanced at one of the sheets, then looked at Wayt and smiled, very friendly now.

"You didn't seem so glad to see us a while back," said Brant. "Get going."

"All right, Brant," said the deputy and went out closing the door softly.

Wayt turned to Deadwood.

"What's the matter, Lafe?" he said. "You ain't saying a word."

"My hand's paining me," said Deadwood, shifting about in his chair and keeping his eyes on the floor.

"Can you use a gun yet with your right?" asked Henry Williams.

"No," said Brant laughing, "but he can outshoot any man in the city except me with his left."

Wingett got to his feet and walked up and down, puffing on his cigar.

"Well," said Wayt, "I reckon we might as well be getting back."

"Sit a spell," said Henry Williams. "When Joe comes back you can leave this building as town marshal, Wayt."

"That's a bang-up notion," said Brant, crossing his legs and accepting a cigar from Williams.

Will Price got out a deck of cards and began to play solitaire. Brant and Henry Williams leaned on

the table to watch. Wingett walked up and down for a while, then he took a seat beside Wayt.

"Wayt," he said, "don't you get the idea I ain't backing you, 'cause I am. But what I deplore is this killing, killing. I can't sleep at night sometimes thinking about it. Don't it never get under your hide?"

"No," said Wayt.

Wingett turned to look him full in the face.

"Not even Joel King and young Frame Tod?" he demanded.

"No," said Wayt. "Joel King was as killing a man as ever lived and was ripe for dying. As for Frame Tod, it seems to me this here community is wasting a lot of sympathy over that varmint."

Wingett thought for a while, then he said:

"Wayt, I reckon you're a pretty good hater."

"I am," said Wayt. "I seen a heap of killing in my time. I can't get excited about one man nohow."

Deadwood raised his head and said:

"I knowed Joel King in Texas, Mr. Wingett. He didn't think no more of killing a man than turning over in bed."

"Well," said Wingett, "I served through the Rebellion, but I never got used to it, no sir. I deplore it

and I'll be glad when Alkali's a peaceable town like where I used to live in Ohio."

"She'll never be that," said Wayt; "not until the silver in them hills peters out and then she'll be so quiet the coyotes'll be parading down Main Street."

Wingett looked up at Wayt, but said nothing.

"Yes sir," said Wayt. "I've seen these mushroom towns before."

There was a long silence.

"I'm hoping she'll never be that quiet," said Wingett, but Wayt's simple statement had set him thinking and he got to his feet and began to walk up and down.

He walked over to the window and stood looking out. The night was cool and clear. A big white moon was high in the sky and the peaks of the San Miguel Mountains loomed white and naked above the dark plain. Lights were scattered far off over the mesa and up into the foothills where torches burned at the mouth of the Culebra de Cascabel Mine. From the edge of the mesa to the silver hills on the east, there were houses, stores, saloons, dance halls, crowded streets, two stage stations, a railroad station, restaurants, churches, schools: three years ago there had been nothing, not even a trail crossing the

mesa. In the Red Hills to the east Geronimo and his warriors had been hiding, waiting for an opportunity to make a sortie into the plain to surprise and murder some lone prospector or a homesteader and his family. Rattlesnakes, buzzards, coyotes and Apaches were the only inhabitants of a mesa where ten thousand white men were now living. Wingett liked to think about that. He had been one of the first settlers. He had seen Alkali grow from a mining camp with one saloon and a few tents to a County Seat. But veins do peter out; then the mines are closed, the miners leave, money begins to get scarce. One by one the settlers move on to other towns, the houses are boarded up, and finally nothing remains but a few old families and a cross roads store: a deserted city sleeping in the sun and dreaming of the past. Wingett was a little saddened when he turned from the window.

When the deputy came in Wayt got to his feet and said:

"Well, we'll be going."

"How's the town, Joe?" asked Henry Williams.

"She's some noisy," said the deputy. "There was a heap of yelling and such when I put up them bulletins."

"She'll quiet down," said Brant.

"Good luck, Wayt," called Will Price.

"Thank you," said Wayt.

He started out followed by Brant and Deadwood. As the deputy opened the door for them, Fin Elder came in. His face was red and he was puffing.

"Hear the news, Fin?" asked Brant, smiling.

Fin glared at Brant, then pushed past him and shouted at Henry Williams:

"As sheriff of San Miguel County I want to have my say regarding this here appointment of Wayt Johnson!"

Deadwood and Brant stopped to listen, but Wayt said:

"Come on, boys. Let Fin have his say."

They went out. Brant leaned against a post, laughing.

"Oh, Lord!" he said, "I ain't had such a good laugh since I seen Fin toting his rear down Main Street, hell bent for election. He surely is the funniest man."

When they went in the Golden Girl they found Luther standing at the bar, leaning on a cane. His face was pale and he was sweating, but the pain had left him temporarily and he was happy.

"Kind of pushing things, ain't you Luther?" said Deadwood.

"Well," said Luther, "I hate to be laying up and useless."

"They appointed Wayt marshal," said Brant.

Luther turned to Wayt.

"That's right lucky, Wayt, coming on top of this Benton business."

Wayt nodded.

"Yes sir," said Brant, laughing, "we're still the law and order party."

"Brant," said Wayt, "you got to settle yourself and forget what that gun of yours is for. We overplayed our hands when we killed them cowboys like we did, and we might have got ourselves in a runkus outside the law and been forced to shoot up some citizens to save our hides."

"That's right," said Luther.

"Well?" Brant demanded.

"Listen," said Wayt, "we're a mighty lucky bunch, I'm telling you, and we're going to go back right where we started and keep our hands off our guns and clean up this town 'cording to law. Now I don't want you to forget that, Brant. If you do, it'll be us or Fin Elder and that would constitute

civil war, which wouldn't be healthy for nobody. I've seen a heap of towns since I left Dodge City and I'd just as lief stay here as not."

"You're getting old," said Brant, "but I'll play your game, Wayt, as I figure you're about the shrewdest man I know."

Smith Sanders came in from a back room.

"Smith," called Brant, "put some liquor out on this bar. Where you been keeping yourself?"

Smith said nothing but took down a bottle and poured whiskey for all of them.

"How's things, Smith?" asked Wayt.

"Fair," said Smith; "only," he put his hands on the bar and stared at them, "I been sort of figuring on selling out, Wayt. I'd like to go on to Tucson and kind of look around."

Brant struck the bar with his fist.

"Wayt," he said, "you don't have no luck at all with your partners. First, Ed Deal, then Smith. Somebody shoots off a gun and they light out."

Smith shifted his feet but said nothing.

"Well," Brant went on, "I been pretty lucky the last few weeks. If you don't put your figure too high I'll buy you out myself."

Wayt turned suddenly and looked around the bar.

"Where's Jim?" he demanded.

"Well," said Luther, "he said something about going up to Tom Edwards' place to play some pool." He tried to shift his weight but a jet of pain shot up through his leg. "God Almighty!" he cried, "I got to sit me down."

Wayt paid no attention to him, but Deadwood helped him to a chair.

"Luther," said Wayt, "Jimmy oughtn't to be running around on a night like this. I reckon I better go see what he's doing."

He turned to finish his whiskey, but just as he raised his glass there was a loud report down the street, like the blast of a shot-gun.

"What's that!" cried Wayt.

Luther got to his feet and they all stood listening. Wayt's face was white.

"Brant," he said, "I got a feeling." He turned on Luther. "Lute Johnson," he shouted, "what do you mean letting Jimmy run around on a night like this."

Brant saw that Wayt's hands were shaking and that he didn't seem anxious to investigate. While they hesitated, Tom Edwards came running in the front door, his hat off and his hair standing up. In

his haste he stumbled over the rail at the end of the bar and fell against Wayt.

"Wayt," he said, "they've shot Jimmy. They shot him through a window. He . . ."

"Good God!" said Smith, staring.

"The sons-of-bitches!" said Brant.

Wayt said nothing but turned and went out of the Golden Girl at a run. Deadwood and Brant followed him, and Luther stood hesitating, his face contorted with pain.

"Luther," said Smith, "for God's sake stay here. They're going to kill all of us. Don't leave me all by myself in this place."

"Ain't you ashamed!" said Luther, sitting down and putting his gun on the table beside him.

Main Street was crowded from the corner of Archer to Tom Edwards' Billiard Parlor. Wayt shoved his way through the mob, shouting "out of my way!" and hitting those who were slow to move. Deadwood and Brant followed, Brant flourishing his revolver and begging somebody to tell him who shot Jimmy.

The men standing in front of the billiard parlor fell back when they saw Wayt, and one man said: "I'd hate to be in somebody's shoes!" When Wayt

went in he saw a bunch of men crowded round something on the floor. There was a pool table between him and the men and he couldn't see what it was, but he knew. Beyond where the men were standing there was a shattered window and glass was scattered all over the floor. He passed the pool table and saw Jim lying doubled up with his arms across his stomach. His blonde hair was bloody and matted.

"Jimmy," said Wayt.

Jim turned his eyes toward the voice but said nothing. There was dead silence in the room. Wayt took off his coat and wrapped it around Jim, then he picked him up and began to carry him toward the door. Jim's head dropped back but he said:

"I seen him. I seen him at the window."

"Who?" Wayt demanded.

But Jim shut his eyes and began to groan. Brant and Deadwood went ahead of Wayt, making a path for him, but this wasn't difficult now as all of the men drew back hastily, some of them taking off their hats. The street was as quiet as the billiard parlor had been.

Doc Harley burst through the crowd, coatless and hatless, his suspenders hanging down.

"You oughtn't to be moving him, Wayt," he said.

"Be quiet," said Wayt.

"Wayt," said Brant, "I'm leaving you. I'm aiming to see what I can find out."

"Don't spare lead," said Wayt.

"I seen him," said Jim, opening his eyes; then he tried to put his arms around Wayt. "Wayt," he said, "I'm going to die, ain't I?"

"Who did you see, Jimmy?" Wayt demanded.

"I don't want to die," said Jim.

Wayt carried him into the Golden Girl and up to his room. He was followed by Deadwood, Doc Harley and Luther, who limped up the stairs, swearing at every step. When Wayt put Jim on the bed, he doubled up, pressed his hands to his belly, and began to cry.

"Jimmy," Wayt insisted, "who did you see?"

"Him," said Jimmy, trying to point. "He was looking at me." He succeeded in raising his arm and pointing at Doc Harley, who turned pale.

"My God, Wayt," he said, "I . . ."

"Jimmy," said Wayt, "who did you see?"

Jim turned his head from side to side and tried to open his eyes. Then there was a long bubbling noise in his throat.

"Wayt," he cried, "I'm dying, ain't I? Can't you

keep me from dying, Wayt?" Suddenly his eyes opened and he tried to sit up. "I seen him shoot Rafael, Wayt. I seen him looking at me."

"El Guero?"

"I seen him," said Jim, twisting around on the bed; "it was Luis."

Wayt stepped away from the bed and Deadwood put his hand on his arm and said:

"I'll kill him for you, Wayt."

"I'll do my own killing," said Wayt.

While Doc Harley examined Jim, Wayt stood looking out the window, seeing nothing. Alkali didn't exist for him now. He thought with contempt of his long fight for law and order. Law and order, yes sir; a mighty pretty phrase. But meaning nothing when they shot your brother down without giving him a Chinaman's chance. To hell with Alkali, to hell with Henry Williams and Mr. Wingett and all the solemn citizens who patted him on the back because he was useful to them. He'd learn them what it meant to kill a Johnson.

"Wayt," said Doc Harley, taking him by the arm, "I can't do nothing for Jimmy 'cepting to give him something to ease his pain."

"Give it to him," said Wayt.

Doc Harley went back to the bed. In a little while Jim had stopped groaning and was sleeping, breathing heavily and irregularly, and turning his head from side to side.

"I'm going, Wayt," said Doc.

"All right," said Wayt. "But, Doc; you never heard Jimmy mention no names."

"Never heard a thing, Wayt," said Doc, then he went out closing the door softly.

Wayt turned to Deadwood.

"You go too."

Deadwood went out without a word. Luther sat down in a chair beside the bed and Wayt stood looking out the window. Jim kept moving his head on the pillow.

"He's shot clean through," said Luther.

Wayt said nothing.

"It was my fault letting him go."

Wayt said nothing.

"I'd rather it was me laying there," said Luther.

"Will you shut your mouth!" said Wayt.

Luther stared at Wayt for a long time, then he got up and went out. Wayt came over to the bed and stood looking down at Jim, whose face was yellowish and streaked with blood. He wanted to shout and

tear his hair. He wanted to go out into the street with a shot-gun and kill. He wanted to see men falling before him, because of Jim. But he took a wash-rag from the dresser and, dampening it, washed Jim's face.

In a little while Brant came up the stairs and joined Deadwood and Luther, who were standing outside the door, smoking.

"Don't go in, Brant," said Luther. "Wayt's acting mighty queer."

They stood there for a long time without speaking, then Brant got a chair for Luther, whose leg was bothering him. Time passed. There was no sound from the room. They saw the window at the end of the hall turn gray with dawn and roosters began to crow over in the Mexican settlement. Just as the sun was coming up they heard Wayt say "God Almighty!" in a loud voice. Brant, who was half asleep, started, then went over and opened the door. Jim was dead. They saw Wayt on his knees beside the bed, crying.

II

Mr. Hinton, the Episcopal minister, stood at the head of the grave in the little hillside cemetery, reading from a bible. His hat was off and a slow, steady wind, blowing across the plain from the San Miguel Mountains, was mussing his hair and pasting his coat against him. The road leading from the Mexican settlement to Boot Hill Cemetery was lined with riderless horses which were quietly grazing. Miners from Elderville, cowboys from the San Jose Valley, from Upper Coyote Flats, gamblers and dance hall women, freighters from as far south as Big Mesa, bad men, bartenders, and roustabouts, and even Yuma May with a half dozen of her girls; all had come not so much to see Jim Johnson buried as to watch his brother, Wayt. With few exceptions they hated and feared Wayt. He was not their kind of man. He was too taciturn, too positive of his own superiority, too moral. He did not get drunk and throw his money away, go on bats and shoot up the town. He did not smile at them and slap them on the

back and play the regular fellow. He was too serious. He meant business. There was no slack to him. He was economical of effort and words. He seemed cold and remote. They watched him standing there in his black suit, dangling his hat, his face impassive but pale. And they enjoyed it. They had not expected him to show his feelings. They knew him too well for that. His pale face was enough.

When the grave digger began to throw in the earth, Luther ducked his head to hide the tears in his eyes. Wayt heard him catch his breath.

"Keep your head up, Luther," he said; "they're watching you."

Luther raised his head.

Brant was standing directly behind Wayt and kept running his eyes over the crowd, looking for Joe Tod or Walt Northrup, or some of their men.

Smith Sanders and Deadwood were missing. Smith had gone on to Tucson, after selling out to Brant. He was as unnerved as Ed Deal had been. Deadwood was in Old Mexico, searching for El Guero.

When Wayt could no longer see the coffin, he turned and walked away, followed by Luther and Brant. The minister touched Wayt's arm and, offering his hand, said:

"I'm certainly sorry, Mr. Johnson."

"Thank you," said Wayt.

Justin and Mr. Dixon joined Wayt at the road and walked along with him. Brant brought up the rear, looking for trouble, but the men he stared at avoided his eyes.

At the edge of the crowd Will Price and Mr. Wingett stepped out and shook hands with Wayt, but said nothing. Wingett was followed by his daughter, who had just got back from school in the East. When Wayt saw her he hastily pulled off his hat.

"Mr. Johnson," she said, "we're all mighty sorry for you losing your brother."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Wayt, bowing.

III

WAYT was sitting at a table at the end of the bar, playing solitaire, when Deadwood came in. Deadwood was covered with dust and looked tired.

"Well?" said Wayt.

"You're right about that greaser, boss," said Deadwood.

"How's that?"

"Well," said Deadwood, "he ain't got a notion any of us knows who shot Jim. Leastways, that's how I figure it."

"Good," said Wayt.

"You see," said Deadwood, "I used to be pretty well known down in them parts in my young days. But they never heard tell of Deadwood. I was Black Hull to them. That was when I wasn't so law-abiding. Well, I met up with a Sonoran who knows El Guero. He just seen him recent and he was boasting what a big man he was in Alkali. So I asks this Sonoran can he get a letter to El Guero. You know

greasers, boss. He had to have silver dollars. But he 'lows he can get a letter through."

"Good," said Wayt; "tell Brant and Luther I want to see 'em upstairs."

Wayt got up and went to his room. Deadwood started out to find Luther and Brant.

Wayt took off his coat and hat and lay down on the bed. He never looked out the window now; he never rode out into the desert at the end of Huston Street. He was a stranger to Alkali, to San Miguel County. He would often think about Dodge City, or Trinidad, or even Rockford. Jim was with them then and there was some sense in things. A man could take pride in being the law then, in taking the wind out of the sails of desperados, of being head peace officer and aiming toward the sheriff's office, and Congress later on, maybe. There was sense in wanting to be a big man and having the citizens patting you on the back and depending on you when things looked bad. There was sense in saving men from lynching and hunting down bandits and making places fit to live in for such people as Will Price and Henry Williams and Mr. Wingett and his daughter. There was sense in being a decent, law-abiding citizen and going along with the best element. He

could even have reconciled himself to a settled life a boiled shirt, and a church pew. But not now. When they killed Jimmy they ironed all that out of him.

Wayt took out his flask and drank, then he got up unloaded his Colt, oiled it and reloaded.

No sir. Alkali wasn't the same place any more. It was just another town; just another spot on the map.

He had always known that he was hated in Alkali He had been generally hated ever since he put on his first badge. Not only because of his character, but because a man who tries to discipline a community will have few friends. But few friends were all he ever wanted. He was by nature solitary. Luther Jim, Brant and Deadwood were enough for him. He did not get along well with a crowd of people. They felt his difference too keenly. Yes, he had always been pretty unpopular, but it had never bothered him. He had never felt the power of organized hatred before. Now Jim was dead.

He knew that he was through in Alkali. He knew that all his carefully laid plans had come to nothing, and he didn't care. Sometimes he would sit down and try to think why he had wanted to be town marshal, sheriff, mayor. Why he had worked so hard

to clean up the town, taken so many affronts, lost so many hours of sleep. Why had Wayt Johnson done that? Why hadn't Wayt Johnson sat back, taken care of his own business and smiled while someone else took the burden on his shoulders? He didn't know the answer. But he did know that he had worn his last badge.

Fin Elder would be reëlected sheriff; he knew that. He also knew that the city election would be the end of the Johnson rule in Alkali. Luther would be defeated for town marshal. Not because he wasn't the best town marshal in the Southwest, but because he was a Johnson. Fin Elder was the type of man people elected to office. A blustering nobody, a backslapper, a trimmer, a tin horn politician. Well, people could feel at home with Fin. They might laugh at him, but they liked his ways.

Wayt smiled. Fin had certainly been making himself scarce the last few days. Ever since the shooting of Jimmy, he had been in Big Mesa on business. Wayt knew that Fin had nothing to do with the killing. That wasn't his way. He did nothing outright. He went round about and worked in the dark. But he succeeded. Sometimes Wayt wondered if Fin wasn't right after all. If all a man wanted in this world was

success, why, then Fin was the best man and that was the end of it. And this thought only confirmed Wayt in his resolution. He was through with the law, with the solemn citizens, with getting on. He was going to live haphazard, like Brant and a hundred others he knew.

In a little while there was a knock at the door and Wayt called "come in." The door opened slowly and Fin Elder put his head in; he looked scared.

"Wayt," he said, "can I see you?"

"You can," said Wayt. "I was just thinking about you, Fin. Have a seat."

Fin snatched off his hat and sat on the edge of his chair. "Wayt," he said, "I'm plumb sick about Jim. We ain't been the best of friends noways, Wayt but I ain't a man that likes to see killing. I'm plumb sick."

"All right, Fin," said Wayt.

"I hope you ain't holding nothing I said about Jimmy against me," said Fin.

"No," said Wayt.

Fin turned his hat round and round.

"I'd 've been in sooner, Wayt," he said, "but I was down to Big Mesa after a killer. I didn't get him."

Wayt said nothing and Fin, very uncomfortable

sat shifting his feet and turning his hat in his hands.

"Looky here, Wayt," he said, "just 'cause you're running against me for sheriff ain't no sign we can't be friends."

"I ain't running," said Wayt.

Fin sat with his mouth open, staring.

"I'm withdrawing," said Wayt. "People hereabouts can't stomach Johnsons."

Fin put his hat beside him on the floor and took a warrant out of his pocket.

"Wayt," he said, "here's that warrant I was telling you about. Now Jimmy's dead I'm tearing it up. I never did believe it noways."

"Fin," said Wayt, "you're a liar."

"Now looky here, Wayt," said Fin, "I come up here to do you a good turn and be friendly. Ain't no wonder the community don't like Johnsons when they won't come half way to be friendly."

Wayt smiled.

"Fin," he said, "you're scared."

Fin got to his feet, flushing, and puffed out his chest.

"I ain't scared of nothing," he said. "I'm just trying to do what's right and proper. There's that warrant." He threw the warrant on the floor. "It's a

mighty queer thing to me," he went on, "that
Johnson can't be friendly with nobody but a John
son. Yes sir. It's mighty queer."

He went out banging the door. Wayt picked up
the warrant, tore it into little pieces, then threw i
under the bed. It didn't matter now. Jimmy wa
gone; it couldn't harm him. As for himself, war
rants were just sheets of paper. From now on he'
never appear in court again. He'd never be arreste
if there were a hundred warrants standing ou
against him. That was over.

Brant pushed open the door, and Luther and Dead
wood followed him into the room.

"Well," said Brant, "I seen Fin Elder coming
down the stairs. What's that double-dealing var
mint doing up here?"

"Just trying to be friendly," said Wayt. "Si
down, you fellers. Yes sir; Fin 'lowed as how jus
because we was both running for sheriff there wasn'
no use in us being enemies."

"The skunk!" said Brant.

"But I told him I was withdrawing, which relieve
him some."

"Ain't you running, boss?" asked Deadwood.

Brant and Luther exchanged a glance.

"Nope," said Wayt, "I'm retiring with honor. It saves me getting beat."

Brant and Luther sat on the bed and Deadwood leaned against the wall and stood staring into the street. Wayt pulled a chair up to the dresser and began to write a note.

"Brant," he called over his shoulder, "Deadwood's got a line on El Guero."

"Good," said Brant.

When Wayt had finished his note he turned to the others.

"Boys," he said, "we all know who killed Jimmy, but our words ain't worth a damn in this community. There ain't a jury in the county would convict him for this killing. But no matter for that."

"Well?" said Brant.

"We're taking the law in our own hands," said Wayt, "and we're going to get into a heap of trouble over it. Any one of you that wants out of this speak up now."

No one said anything.

"All right," said Wayt, then he passed the note around.

It read:

DEAR LUIS:

The killing of Jim Johnson was a mighty good job and the city of Alkali is right thankful. We don't know who hired you or if anyone hired you or what you got paid. But we are willing to make you a proposition. The worst of the Johnsons ain't been touched. You know who we mean. We will pay you five thousand dollars on the day of his death. The bearer of this message will give you a hundred dollars just to consider it. If you ain't afraid, and we know you ain't, follow the messenger to the Mexican settlement and he will communicate with us.

FRIENDS OF ORDER.

"Now, Deadwood," said Wayt, "see that Jose Orante gets his money first and then promise him double. If the scheme works, I'll see that he's taken care of."

"It'll take some talking," said Deadwood. "That Orante feller is plumb scared of El Guero."

"Money talks with Mexicans," said Wayt. "Tell him to see the Sonoran and they can deliver the letter together."

"I ain't any too certain how it'll work," said Deadwood, "as Mexicans are a mighty clannish lot."

"It's worth trying, anyway," said Luther.

IV

On the 15th of November the Alkali newspapers got out special editions. The Golden Girl had been sold by its proprietors, Mr. W. S. Johnson and Mr. J. B. White to Mr. Geronimo Carmeno, proprietor of the White Front Saloon. This was but one item, and the least interesting. The other was, that Wayt Johnson had retired as candidate for sheriff and Luther Johnson as candidate for town marshal.

Alkali celebrated that night. The saloons and gambling houses were crowded from sundown to sunup. Cowhands from the San Jose Valley rode through the town openly carrying guns, and at midnight Huston Street was filled with a mob of drunken men and women who had commandeered a Mexican orchestra from the Settlement. A bonfire was built at the end of Huston Street and the orchestra sat on the porch of the Old Trail Hotel and played till dawn.

About one o'clock Mr. Wingett and Henry Williams walked over to the house Wayt had taken on Stonewall Street and knocked. The house was dark, but someone called:

"Who's there?"

"That you, Wayt?" said Wingett.

Wayt opened the door.

"Well," said Wingett, "this town's in a hell of a shape. Why ain't you out cleaning up?"

Wayt took hold of Wingett's wrist and put something in his hand. It was a badge.

"Go pin it on George Stanley," said Wayt. "I'm done."

"But Wayt . . ." Wingett began.

"Sorry," said Wayt, and closed the door.

"Now that's mighty funny," said Wingett.

"Don't know as it is," said Henry Williams. "Wayt ain't been the same since Jimmy was killed. Reckon we're in for it, Mr. Wingett."

They went back to the courthouse and, after a short consultation, sent a deputy out after George Stanley.

V

Wayt was sitting in front of his house in the dark with a rifle across his knees when Brant rode up. Wayt got to his feet hastily and called:

"What's the matter, Brant?"

Brant jumped off his horse and hitched it to a post.

"Well," said Brant, "I don't know for certain, Wayt. But Luis took out."

"God damn!" said Wayt.

Brant put his hand on Wayt's shoulder.

"We'll get him for you, Wayt. Don't you worry none. We dern near had him this time. But he must 've got scared. I don't blame him personally."

"How about Jose?" said Wayt. "You reckon he told Luis what was up?"

"Don't reckon so," Brant said. "What would he bring him clean to Alkali for?"

Wayt sat down and Brant stood leaning against the house, rolling a cigarette.

"How's Luther feeling?" he asked finally.

"Well," said Wayt, "he's still got fever, but his leg ain't hurting him like it was."

Brant said nothing, and Wayt got up and went inside. When he came out he said:

"He's sleeping, Brant. I reckon he must feel some better."

While they were talking someone rode up in front of the house and called to them. It was Deadwood and he had Jose Orante with him. The Mexican was begging Deadwood not to kill him.

"Here he is, Wayt," said Deadwood. "I can't get nothing out of him."

Wayt took Jose by the wrist and pulled him into the house. Brant and Deadwood followed. Brant lit the lamp. In the light they could see how pale the Mexican was; his lips were bluish and he was rolling his eyes. When Wayt took a whip down from the wall, he fell on his knees and began to pray in Spanish.

"Jose," said Wayt, "didn't I give you two hundred dollars?"

"Si, señor."

"Well," said Wayt, "what do you mean letting El Guero get away from you? Or did you tell him

something? Now you just speak right up or I'm going to give you a hiding you'll never forget."

"Señor," cried Jose, "I tell him nothing. El Guero all right. He go find out something. Maybe see girl. El Guero kill me if I tell him what you do. I no tell him. He say maybe he come back, maybe he don't. I don't know. What could I do?"

Wayt raised his whip.

"What did you say to him?"

"Señor," cried Jose, "I tell him he make lots of money he kill you. I tell him I know men who will pay money. All he must do is kill you, then I pay him."

Wayt let go of Jose and pointed toward a chair.

"Go sit there," he said, "and don't move till I tell you."

"Wayt," said Brant, "what I figure is, that this here Luis wasn't taking no chances. That he was aiming to get the killing over pronto, and make Jose collect the money."

Wayt nodded.

"Yes sir," said Deadwood; "that's the lay of the land for certain."

"Maybe," said Wayt. "Or maybe he's looking up the skunks that paid him for killing Jimmy."

"I know," cried Jose. "He go White Front maybe so, he say."

"Jose," said Wayt, "you had a pretty good chance to talk to him. What did he say about us?"

"Señor," said Jose, "he say Johnsons are fools. Johnsons fight in open street and don't know Apache warfare. He say Johnsons don't know who kill Jimmy. Then he laughs."

"Brant," said Wayt, "go up to the White Front and look around. If he ain't there look all over the Mexican settlement. I'll be at the corner of Archer and Main in front of the Golden Girl."

"All right," said Brant, starting out.

"And Brant," said Wayt, "chase him my way. Don't scatter any lead 'less you think he's making a break."

Brant smiled and went out.

"Go wake Luther, Lafe," said Wayt to Deadwood, who nodded and went into the next room.

"Jose," said Wayt, "I reckon we been wrong about you. If we get El Guero you'll get your pay in full. But I want you to set right on that chair till I come back."

"Si," said Jose, smiling with relief and bowing.

Luther came into the sitting-room wearing only

his pants and an undershirt, and carrying his boots in his hands.

"Well?" he said.

"Luther," said Wayt, "I want you to set up a spell and keep an eye on this Mexican. You'd best put out the light and set in the dark, as El Guero's prowling some place."

"All right," said Luther. Then he turned to Jose. "Listen; when I put out that light, I don't want you to move. If you do, I'll get careless."

"But, señor," said Jose, "I am a Johnson man."

When Wayt and Deadwood were ready to go, Luther put out the light.

"Got your stuff packed, Luther?" asked Wayt.

Luther laughed.

"In the saddle bags," he said.

"Well," said Wayt, "there ain't any of us taking much."

Wayt and Deadwood went out. When they reached the lamp-post at the corner of Stonewall and Archer, Wayt said:

"Go to the north end of town, Lafe, and work south. But don't shoot 'less you have to."

"I'll save him for you, boss," said Deadwood.

Wayt watched Deadwood go, then he turned and

walked slowly up Archer Street. It was about eleven o'clock and the streets were crowded. A group of cowhands was loafing in front of the Transcontinental, talking and laughing, and the sidewalks in front of the Palace Dance Hall and the Golden Girl were packed. It was Thanksgiving night and all the stores were open. The streets were nearly as light as in the daytime. There were miners, their faces shining from their holiday shave, wearing clean shirts and even derbies and lowcuts; cavalry officers from Fort Blaine in well-brushed uniforms, twirling their mustaches and flirting with the women; ranchmen from Iron Springs and the San Jose Valley, wearing big sombreros with their store clothes; Chinamen, Mexicans and even negroes, all dressed up for the Holiday.

Wayt crossed Main Street and stood in front of the Golden Girl, leaning against a post with his hat down over his eyes. He paid no attention to the jostling men around him; he didn't see the oil flares in front of the Palace, nor hear the scraping of the fiddles. He kept his eyes on the street. Time passed. Someone jostled him and swore at him for being in the way; it was a stranger. Wayt looked at him. But the man with the stranger took him by the arm and

hissed: "You dumb fool! That's Wayt Johnson." Wayt looked away. The crowd continued to jostle round him; the fiddles scraped incessantly in the dance hall. After a while he looked at his watch. He had been waiting an hour. Someone spoke to him. It was George Stanley with his marshal's badge shining on his coat lapel.

"Howdy, Wayt."

"Howdy, George."

"Wearing a gun, I see, Wayt."

"Yep," said Wayt. "Ain't enforcing that ordinance now, are you, George?"

"I am, with the riff-raff, Wayt. So long."

Wayt turned and watched him go. That was what he himself had been working so hard at a while back: wearing a badge and strutting around being the big man. Hell! He shrugged his shoulders and pushed back his hat. Then he glanced at his watch. An hour and twenty minutes. Still the fiddles scraped. Just as he was rolling a cigarette, Brant took him by the arm. Brant's face was red and he was panting.

"Well?" Wayt demanded.

"Here he comes," said Brant. "I reckon he's on his way down to Orantes."

"Riding?"

"Yep. Right down the middle of the street, the locoed idiot!"

"Brant," said Wayt, "keep your eyes on the crowd case there's trouble."

"That's me," said Brant.

Wayt stepped out into the street. Several men noticed him and turned to stare at one another. What was up?

El Guero was riding along slowly, smoking. He had his right leg over the pommel. He seemed perfectly at ease.

Wayt took a step toward him and called:

"Luis!"

El Guero turned suddenly, saw Wayt, threw his cigarette away, and dropped his right foot into the stirrup, then he smiled.

"Buenas tardes, amigo," he said, but he was startled and kept wetting his lips.

"Luis," said Wayt, "get off that horse. I want to see you."

But El Guero took fright. There was something about Wayt's attitude that warned him. He pulled off his hat and, pretending to bow, put spurs to his horse, which plunged from a walk into a gallop.

Wayt drew his gun, took steady aim, and fired. The horse shied, then stopped, turned half around and fell, throwing El Guero clear of the saddle.

Men came running toward the sound of the shot from the dance halls and bars, colliding with men in the street, who were hunting cover. Someone shouted: "It's the Johnsons!" and there was a panic. Since the killing of Jim Johnson, Alkali had feared reprisals. Now every man who had ever been seen talking to the Tods or the Northrups considered himself a potential victim. Before El Guero had got to his feet, the street was deserted except for a dozen men who were more curious than scared. Brant was leaning against a hitching rack in front of the Palace with his hand on his gun.

El Guero, half stunned by his fall, got slowly to his feet. He saw Wayt coming toward him with a smoking gun in his hand and cried:

"Amigo! What have I done?"

"Luis," cried Wayt, "you killed Jimmy. But I ain't shooting you down like I ought. Git out your gun and go to work."

El Guero turned to the men standing near him.

"Stop him!" he cried. "I have done nothing. I am friend of the Johnsons. He will kill me."

"Luis," said Wayt, "I'm giving you one more chance."

The men drew back and some of them hurried into the dance-hall. It wasn't none of their fight; not against them locoed Johnsons.

"Kill him, Wayt!" said Brant.

"Luis friend of the Johnsons!" cried El Guero. "Luis did not kill Jimmy. Jimmy friend of Luis."

He backed slowly away from Wayt toward the corner of the dance hall. While Wayt hesitated, El Guero's horse gave a lurch, and, raising on its front legs, tried to get to its feet, its head and shoulders between Wayt and El Guero.

"Look out!" cried Brant.

El Guero turned swiftly and made a break for the dark alleyway between the Palace and the Transcontinental. Wayt took one step sideways to clear his range and fired. El Guero stopped and took hold of the corner of the dance hall with both hands. Then Wayt fired three more shots. El Guero slid slowly to the sidewalk and knelt there, supporting himself against the building. Brant fired a shot from close range and El Guero fell over backwards.

"There! you killing skunk!" said Brant.

The street was empty now except for three men,

one a stranger from Big Mesa, one a drunken miner from Elderville, who didn't know what the firing was for, and George Stanley. His duty was clear enough, but after watching El Guero die, he turned suddenly and went off down Archer Street.

"Good God," said the stranger to Wayt, "that was a heartless killing."

"Looking for trouble?" said Brant.

"No," said the stranger, drawing back.

"He killed my brother," said Wayt.

Brant bent down and looked at El Guero.

"Well," he said, "he's dead and Alkali is shut of a proper rascal."

Wayt loaded his gun, then turned and walked toward Archer on Main. At the corner he met Deadwood, who had been running.

"Got him," said Wayt.

"I heard the firing," said Deadwood.

Brant caught up with them and they went down Archer to Stonewall. Luther was sitting on the front steps with Jose beside him.

"Well?" Luther demanded.

"We got him," said Wayt.

"Yep," said Brant; "but we mighty near didn't, Luther. Your brother is the kindest-hearted man in

the Southwest, giving a skunk like that a chance to draw."

"See?" said Jose; "what I tell you is truth. I am a Johnson man. I no tell him nothing."

"You're all right, Jose," said Wayt. "Come inside and we'll settle up."

Wayt went in and lit the lamp and the others followed him. When Jose had been paid off he stood in the doorway, bowing and smiling.

"You don't know how I hate El Guero," he said. "He kill my brother. I ride out bring my brother in wagon to our home. He die when I am gone. But I spend money to bury him. Also I spend money Señor Wayt Johnson give my grandmother. You don't know how I love the Johnsons. Thank you, thank you."

When he had gone Luther stretched out on the couch and the others sat round him. Nobody said anything. Brant took out a pint of whiskey and passed it around.

Finally Wayt said:

"Well, boys, I reckon we're done in Alkali."

Nobody said anything.

"She's been a mighty tough town for us." Wayt went on, "and I can't say I'm sorry to be leaving."

"Wayt," said Luther, "don't you think we ought to be getting on our way tonight?"

"No sir," said Wayt. "I'm never leaving this town in the night. I'm going to get me some sleep. I can sleep peaceful tonight since that Mexican varmint's dead."

"Well," said Brant, "get at it then, 'cause we'd best be leaving about dawn."

"Or a little later," said Wayt, smiling.

Wayt went into the bedroom, pulled off his boots, and lay down. In a little while they heard him snoring.

Deadwood scratched his head, then jerked his thumb toward the room where Wayt was lying.

"He ain't the same Wayt, no sir," he said. "He don't seem to give a damn for nothing nohow."

"It hit him hard Jimmy getting killed that way when the old lady asked him to look out for him," said Luther.

"Well," said Brant, "all I got to say is, Wayt Johnson's the squarest man I ever met. I never took orders from nobody till I met him."

"That's the way with Wayt," said Luther. "Folks that know him take his orders."

They sat smoking.

"How's the leg, Luther?" asked Brant.

"She's humming right now," said Luther, "and I still got a sight of fever. That must've been a pizen bullet."

"Is she saddle worthy?"

"She's got to be."

"Well," said Deadwood, getting up and stretching, "I reckon I'll sit out front a spell and see that there ain't no prowlers."

"Luther," said Brant, "do you reckon they'll come after us for that killing?"

"Well," said Luther, "it's possible, but Wayt says we ain't to take no arresting noway, so there you are."

At dawn Deadwood was still sitting on the porch, but Wayt was beside him now, pulling on his boots. The sun was coming up over the Red Hills and the light was spreading out into the streets. A slow wind blew across the mesa. They heard roosters crowing.

"Well," said Wayt, "this is our last morning in Alkali, Lafe."

"Yep," said Deadwood, "but I've seen a heap of towns in the last ten years and it's all one to me."

"Hey!" called Luther from inside, "come get your breakfast."

They went in. The table was set and they smelled coffee and bacon. Brant was still lying on the couch, snoring. Wayt shook him.

"Brant," he called, "open them eyes."

"I been calling him for a half hour," said Luther. "He's the damndest feller for sleeping I ever seen."

Wayt tumbled Brant off the couch. He lay looking up at Wayt.

"Right spry this morning, ain't you, Mr. Johnson?" he demanded, then he got to his feet and stood yawning and stretching. "A man's a fool," he went on, "that gits up 'fore noon. I'm damned if I got any liking for seeing the sun come up."

They sat down to breakfast. It was broad daylight now and men began to pass the house on their way to work.

"Funny," said Brant, "we ain't seen a peace officer or such a matter. I was figuring maybe George Stanley would organize him a posse, being's he was in at the demise."

Deadwood gulped down his second cup of coffee, then he got up.

"I'll get the horses," he said.

The rest of them sat talking for a little while longer, then they got up, put on their coats, saw that their guns were loaded, and went out. Luther locked the door and put the key on the window ledge.

"Well," said Wayt, staring out into the street, "this is the last time I ever set foot in this town."

"All towns is alike mostly," said Brant. "Faro's a game that ain't despised nowhere, so I ain't worrying."

A man, on his way to work, crossed the street to avoid them. He and his family had sat up half the night, talking about the killing of El Guero and what the authorities would do to the Johnsons.

"Hi!" called Brant, nudging Wayt.

"Good morning, sir," said the man.

Brant laughed.

"Fighting mighty shy of us. What's he want to sir me for? He's played faro over my table."

Deadwood brought the horses and Wayt helped Luther into the saddle. Luther groaned and then swore.

"I'd as leave be dead as carrying this blasted thing with me," he said.

"She'll ease off," said Wayt.

Brant's horse was restive and kept prancing sideways and trying to turn around.

"Just wait, mister," said Brant to his horse, "you won't be so spry tomorrow morning."

Deadwood and Wayt got on their horses, and Deadwood, leading the pack horse, started off down Stonewall Street, but Wayt said:

"This way, Lafe. We'll stop for a drink at the White Front."

"You're right," said Brant, laughing. "Let's do it up brown. Hell, we ain't afraid of this whole town."

"Well," said Luther, "it's all the same to me, but I'm saying we've done enough shooting, and if we go sashaying down Main Street we may have to scatter some lead."

"All in a lifetime," said Brant.

They rode abreast down Archer Street and turned south at Main. Wayt, Luther and Brant had rifles across their saddles. Deadwood, with the packhorse to handle, had his rifle in the saddle-scabbard.

People came out of the stores and stood on the sidewalks, staring at them. Men, just waking up, leaned out of windows, yawning and stretching. "Glad you're going!" yelled somebody, and there

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was a short cheer. Then a man leaned from a window in the Transcontinental and shouted: "Going hunting, boys?"

"Yes," called Brant, "we're hunting for jackasses. Better pull your head in."

The town was broad awake now. Clerks were sweeping off the sidewalks in front of the stores, the lights in the saloons and gambling halls were being put out, and Ez Coons, the post master, was unlocking the doors of the post office. Three Mexicans were lounging at the corner of Huston and Main, but when they saw the Johnsons coming they turned swiftly and ducked down an alleyway between two buildings.

The riders drew up at the White Front and Brant and Wayt got down. Luther stayed in his saddle because of his leg and Deadwood kept him company. When the bartender saw Brant and Wayt coming in, he turned and called:

"Joe!"

Carmeno came out of a back room.

"Eh?" he said. Then seeing Brant and Wayt, he started. "Oh, good morning," he said. "Up early."

"Get out the best you got, Joe," said Brant. "We're leaving your fair city."

"So!" said Carmeno.

"Yes," said Brant, "we figure we ain't as popular hereabouts as we used to be."

"So!" said Carmeno.

They drank in silence. While Joe was pouring them their second drink, they heard voices. Turning, they saw that there was a crowd in the street. Deadwood called to them.

"Well, well," said Brant; "peace officers this early in the morning."

"They ain't arresting nobody, Brant," said Wayt.

"I know," said Brant.

When they went out they saw Fin Elder and George Stanley talking to Luther. There was a crowd in the middle of the street and several Mexicans on the edge of it were shouting threats in Spanish.

Fin Elder came over to Wayt.

"Wayt Johnson, I arrest you for the murder of Luis Montoya."

"How about me, Fin?" said Brant.

"You, too," said Fin.

"Brant," said Wayt, "get on your horse and don't be talking back to officers of the law."

Brant turned his back on Fin and climbed into the saddle. George Stanley came over to Wayt.

"Fin," said Wayt, "take my advice and let well enough alone. We're leaving you for good. You'll never be bothered with us no more."

"Wayt," said Fin, "as Sheriff of San Miguel County I ask you to lay down your arms and come with me peaceable."

"Fin," said Wayt, "if you persist in them ways of yours you'll get yourself killed and then what would San Miguel County do? Think of all the helpless people left to the mercies of the lawless. No sir, Fin. I wouldn't insist too much if I was you."

Fin scratched his head and turned to George Stanley.

"What do you say, George?"

"Well," said George, looking at the ground, "there's only two of us."

Wayt swung into the saddle, and Brant and Luther turned their horses' heads to the west.

"All right," said Wayt.

But the crowd protested. "Arrest them men, Fin Elder," called somebody. "Ain't you the sheriff?" Fin stood scratching his head. The riders started down Huston Street, Luther and Deadwood looking straight ahead of them, but Brant and Wayt forcing their horses along sideways, their hands on their

rifles. "Fin Elder," cried somebody, "you're a hell of a sheriff!" One of the Mexicans swore violently in Spanish, then fired at Wayt with a revolver, the bullet going wild. Fin leapt into the crowd and hit the Mexican over the head with the butt of his gun. "Disturbing the peace, are you!" he shouted, hustling the Mexican toward the jail.

Brant White burst out laughing.

"Wayt," he said, "that's just what I been telling you. Fin Elder is the best peace officer in the whole Southwest. Look at him taking that two-gun man to jail."

Wayt said nothing. The four of them rode along in silence. At the edge of town they turned south and hit the trail for War Bonnet.